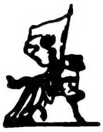

Everybody's

NUMBER THREE MARCH, 1925 VOLUME FIFTY-TWO

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

CONTENTS

A COMPLETE NOVEL

Conquest (See page 179) JAY GELZER 51
Illustrations by HARLEY E. STIVERS

SIX SHORT STORIES

Canned Salmon (See page 179) STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT 30
Mayes (See page 179) CAPTAIN DINGLE 37
Illustration by COURTNEY ALLEN
The Sporting Thing to Do LUCIAN CARY 89
Illustration by LOUIS G. SCHROEDER
Broadway Forever GAYNE DEXTER 99
Illustration by S. GEORGE PHILLIPS
Hypostasia RALPH BARSTOW 135
Illustration by HARRY T. FISK
The White Pigeon PROSPER BURANELLI 150

THREE SERIALS

The Great Samara E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM 9
Illustrations by JOSEPH A. MATURO
The Phantom Caravan HOWARD VINCENT O'BRIEN 110
Illustrations by RALPH PALLEN COLEMAN
March Winds FRANCIS R. BELLAMY 160
Illustration by JOHN R. NEILL

OTHER FEATURES—Flowered Hat, a poem, by Margaret Widdemer, 159. Departments: Everybody's Chimney Corner, 179; Prose and Worse, by Gridley Adams, 181; Everybody's Chestnut Tree, 183. Cover Design by Charles A. MacLellan.

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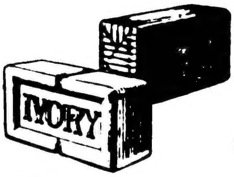

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6 In all cases of real trouble, a physician's advice should be obtained before treatment is attempted.

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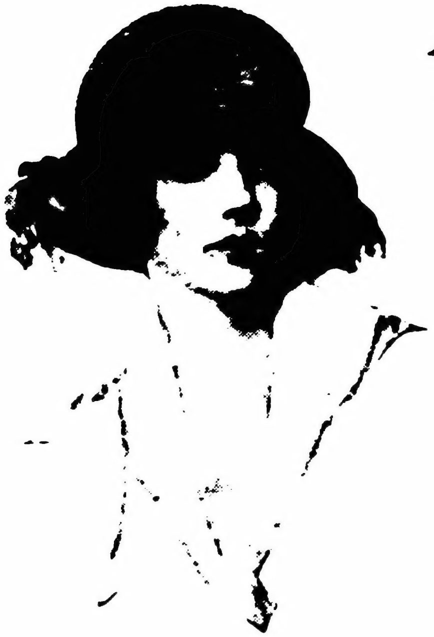
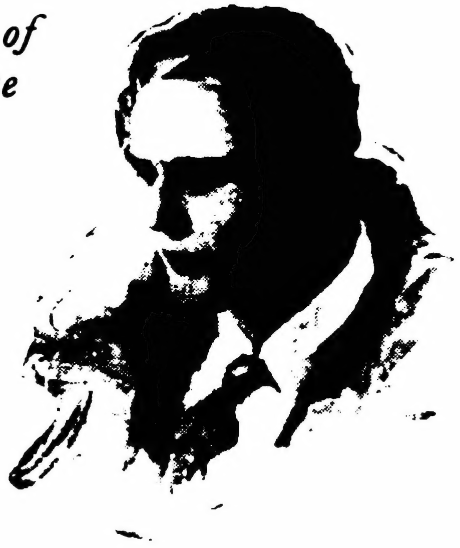
Everybody's

Vol. 52, No. 3 March, 1925 Sewell Haggard, Editor



A Romance of a New Time



Illustrations by
Joseph A. Maturo

The Great Samara

The Man Who Conquered Bolshevism in Its Stronghold Has a Startling Escape from Death in a New York Hotel, and Makes a Dubious New Friend

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Author of "The Wrath to Come"

MISS SADIE LOYES, manager of the Hotel Weltmore Typewriting and Secretarial Bureau, set down the receiver of the telephone which had its place upon her desk and looked thoughtfully around at the eleven young ladies who comprised her present staff. She stood there, an angular, untidy-looking person, tapping a pencil against her teeth, unconscious arbiter, not only of the lives of two very interesting people, but also of the fate of a great nation. Portentous events depended upon her decision. A man's life in this teeming city of New York was a small enough matter of itself. The life of this prospective client of hers, however, waiting now in his suite on the eleventh floor for the help which he had summoned, was hung about with destiny.

Meanwhile, Miss Sadie Loyes continued to tap her teeth with the pencil and reflect. Which should it be? The nearest and apparently the most industrious? Her eyes rested disparagingly upon Miss Bella Fox's golden-brown coiffure. These were dressy days in New York and style was all very well in its way, but there was no mistaking the abbreviations of the young lady's costume—very low from the throat downward and displaying a length of limb which, although perhaps sanctioned by fashion, paid no excessive tribute to modesty. Miss Fox's jewelry, too, was a little too much in evidence and there were rumors about dinners at the Ritz!

On the whole perhaps it would be better to keep this particular young lady back for one of these western millionaires. Dorothy Hamilton might do: a young woman of far more modest appearance, but a little careless with her shorthand. Possibly it was as well not to risk her on an important assignment. Then there was Florence White—expert enough, but a little mysterious in her private life, and the recipient of too many boxes of candy and offerings of roses from her clients to inspire her employer with thorough confidence as to her commercial ability. Then the pencil stopped. Miss Borans! Nothing whatever against her; efficient, self-contained, reserved alike in dress and demeanor, but with an air of breeding which none of these others possessed. Absolutely the obvious choice.

"Miss Borans," the manager called out, in a shrill tone, "just step this way, please."

The young lady addressed rose with composure, pushed her chair back into its place. and approached her employer. Space was limited in the Hotel Weltmore, and the Typewriting and Secretarial Bureau was really a railed-off portion of the lounge on the first floor reserved for "Ladies Only."

"I guess you'd better slip up to Number 1180," Miss Loyes directed. "I'll send a machine and the rest of the stuff right along—gentleman there in a hurry—his secretary caught the fever while he was in Washington. Samara, his name is—the good Lord knows where he got it!"

The girl seemed to stiffen.

"Samara, the Russian envoy?" she asked.

"You've got it, honey. Speaks with an English accent, though, you could cut with a knife."

"I would rather not work for Gabriel Samara," the girl declared.

IT TOOK a great deal to surprise Miss Sadie Loyes, but this newest recruit to her secretarial staff had certainly succeeded.

"How?" she exclaimed. "What's that?"

Miss Borans had not in the least the appearance of a young woman of mercurial or changeable temperament. Nevertheless, she seemed already to be repenting her rather rash pronouncement.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Loyes," she said. "That was perhaps a foolish speech of mine. Number 1180, you said. I will go there at once."

"Say, do you know anything of this Mr. Samara?" the manager asked.

"Nothing, personally," was the prompt reply.

"You haven't worked for him before? He hasn't tried to be fresh with you or anything of that sort?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what's the grouch, eh?"

Miss Borans hesitated. "I am of Russian descent," she confided. "One has prejudices. It was foolish."

Miss Sadie Loyes had had a great deal of experience with the younger members of her sex, and she studied her employee for a minute thoughtfully. Miss Catherine Borans conformed to no type with which she was familiar. She was a young woman of medium height, slim and with the promise of a perfect body beneath the almost Quaker-like simplicity of her gown. She was rather full-faced, with a broad forehead, dark silky eyelashes and clear brown eyes. Her features were distinguished by reason of their clean-cut clarity; her mouth was perfectly shaped, although her lips were a little full. Her expression was not to be reckoned with, for during the few weeks she had been employed at the Bureau she had wrapped herself in a mantle of impenetrable reserve.

"I guessed you were a foreigner," Miss Sadie Loyes remarked finally. "Well, anyway, this Mr. Samara is a great guy over there, isn't he? The papers here are giving him a lot of publicity."

Miss Sadie Loyes had spent a busy life in narrow ways and, leaving out England, France and Germany, "over there" represented for her the rest of Europe.

"In his way I have no doubt that he is a great man," Miss Borans acknowledged coldly. "I was foolish to have any feeling in the matter."

She passed on with her notebook in her hand, a noticeable figure in the bustling promenades of the hotel, both from the quiet distinction of her appearance and from her utter indifference to the cosmopolitan throng through which she passed. She took her place in the crowded elevator, alighted at the eleventh floor, received a pleasant nod from the young lady seated on guard at the corner of the corridor, and touched the bell of Room 1180.

"Mr. Samara's right there now," the latter observed from behind her desk. "I guess he's needing help badly, too. They're talking of having to take his secretary away to the hospital. Stomach trouble, I guess. These foreigners eat different than us."

The door in front of them was suddenly opened. Miss Borans was confronted by a person of somewhat alarming appearance: a man more than six feet in height and broad in proportion, florid, blue-eyed and truculent. Not even the studious somberness of his attire could bring him into line with any recognized type of domestic servitor. He stared at this visitor without speaking.

"I have come from the Typewriting Bureau downstairs to do some work for Mr. Samara," she announced.

TYPISTS, especially of this order, were unknown quantities in the world where Ivan Rortz had spent most of his days, but he stood aside and ushered her through the little hall to the sitting-room beyond. It was of the ordinary hotel type, but flooded with light, overheated, and, as it seemed to her in those first few seconds, almost overcrowded with flowers. Everywhere they flaunted their elegance against the uncouth decorations of the room: a queer contrast of exotic beauty and pretentious ugliness. A man swung round from a writing-desk to look at her—a man who she knew at once must be Samara.

His study of her was superficial and incurious. She, on the other hand, brought all her powers of observation to bear upon the man whom it was her daily lesson to learn to hate. The illustrated press of many countries had made his features in a sense familiar—yet in a further sense it had never done him justice. She saw a man well over middle height, broad-shouldered yet with a tendency to stoop. His face was as hard as granite, cruel, perhaps, and as expressionless as her own, yet redeemed by a mouth which had wonderful possibilities of tenderness and humor. His hair was black and short, his eyebrows overheavy, his clear gray eyes almost unduly penetrating.

"Well?" he exclaimed curtly.

"I am from the typewriting office," she announced once more.

He nodded. "Where is your machine?"

"On the way up."

He pointed toward the book she was carrying.

"You write shorthand?"

"Certainly."

"Take down some letters. Sit where you please. I usually walk about. Some I will give you direct to the typewriter, when it arrives."

She seated herself deliberately at the end of the table, opened her book, and glanced at her pencil to be sure that it was sharp. Then she waited. He rose and stood with his back to her, looking out of the window. Presently he swung round, took up a sheaf of letters from the desk, and grunted as he inspected them.

"Rubbishy work," he declared, "but it must be done. Invitations to every sort of function under the sun. One reply will do for the lot: 'Mr. Gabriel Samara regrets that he is unable to accept the invitation, etc., etc., owing to the shortness of his stay in the United States.' . . . Got that?"

"Yes," she answered.

He threw a selection of the letters on the table before her, destroying the remainder. Then he made his way back to the desk and loitered there with his hands in his pockets.

"I can't do these until the typewriter arrives," she reminded him.

"Naturally," he replied dryly. "I was wondering about the rest of the work. Here is your machine."

There was a knock at the door and a boy arrived with the typewriter, which he set upon the table. As Catherine Borans commenced her task, the telephone bell rang, and Samara motioned her to answer it.

"A gentleman from the New York *Hemisphere* would like to see you," she announced.

He shook his head. "You can answer all applications from journalists in the same manner," he said. "Just tell them that Mr. Samara has nothing to communicate to the press—with one exception, mind. A Mr. Bromley Pride will ring up from the New York *Comet*. I will accord him an interview. And, while we are on this subject, be so good as to inform the young lady outside that I will not have people waiting about in the corridor to waylay me when I come out. My lips are sealed. I have nothing to say to any one."

Miss Borans carried out her instructions faithfully. Then she recommenced her task. Suddenly Samara paused in his restless perambulation of the room and looked at her intently.

"Are you to be trusted, young lady?" he inquired brusquely.

She abandoned her typing for a moment and looked up at him.

"I should say not," she replied.

SAMARA was distinctly taken aback. His expression was one of incredulous surprise, mingled with some irritation.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"My reply to your question," she explained, "was truthful, though of course relative. I should not, as a matter of fact, care to be trusted with any of your important political correspondence."

"And why not?"

"I prefer not to discuss the matter further."

He smiled with gentle sarcasm.

"May I ask if this self-advertised untrustworthiness is universal among the young ladies of the bureau from which you come?"

She considered for a moment. "Of course you can send for some one else if you like," she said. "I would not trust any one of them with confidential documents, though. Your private secretary is the person to deal with them."

"But my private secretary," he confided, "is ill. They are talking of taking him to the hospital."

She shrugged her shoulders. "That is unfortunate," she admitted. "Still, you have an Embassy in Washington and a Russian consul here. Surely they should be able to help you."

"You are without doubt a young woman of resource," he declared with an indulgent smile. "Nevertheless, there are reasons why I do not wish to avail myself of the services of any one having an official connection with my country."

"Then," she advised, "I should write my letters myself."

He stood looking down at her, his hands in his pockets, his thick eyebrows almost meeting in a heavy frown. She felt her heart beating a little more quickly. Notwithstanding her even manner and her very equable poise toward life, she was conscious of something in this man's presence which was akin to fear.

"Your candor," he said, "inspires me with a certain amount of confidence. I hate writing letters. My brain moves so much more quickly than my clumsy fingers, that anything which I put on paper is generally illegible. There is a boat leaving tonight for Cherbourg, where I have a special agent waiting, and it is necessary that I send an account of my negotiations here. What is to be done?"

"I can only repeat that if your report has to do with your negotiations with the President, I should write it by hand and hope for the best," she rejoined coolly.

His eyes flashed. For a moment he seemed almost to lose control of himself.

"What in the name of all the Holy Saints of Russia do you know about my negotiations with the President?" he demanded.

"Nothing more than a few million other people of the city," she replied. "I am an intelligent student of the daily press, like most American girls."

He looked at her suspiciously. "I am not at all sure that you are an American girl," he growled.

"I have lived in New York for twenty-three years," she said meekly. "You may not think it but I can assure you that has not left me much time to imbibe the instincts of other nationalities."

He sat at the opposite end of the table, staring at her, his hands in his pockets, his expression curiously dominated by the uncertain curve of his lips. For a brief moment she wondered whether he were not laughing at her.

"Are all the young ladies of the Weltmore Typewriting Bureau gifted with such glib tongues?" he inquired.

"By no means," she assured him. "Believe me, I am quite an exception. I think I was sent because I was considered the most serious-minded."

"Heaven help the others!" he muttered. "Now listen. I am going to trust you to a certain extent against your own advice. I shall dictate to you all except the vital part of my communication. A great deal of what you are going to take down I should prefer you to forget. The most private part of all I shall write in my own hand, and God grant that some one at the other end will be able to read it."

CATHERINE BORANS thrust a new sheet of paper into the typewriter and bent over her task. For half an hour or more the man opposite to her dictated. Then he took the sheets which she had typed over to his desk and drew pen and ink toward him.

"You can go on with the other work," he enjoined, commencing to write.

The scratching of his pen ceased almost as she addressed the last of her envelopes. He turned in his chair just as she had risen to her feet.

"Don't go yet," he begged, throwing another pile of letters upon the table. "There are all these to be attended to and it is necessary for some one to be here to answer the telephone. Besides, I have a question to ask you."

"A question?" she repeated doubtfully.

"Yes. I am a stranger in your country and I hope that you will gratify my curiosity. If I had dictated the vital part of this letter to you, wherein lay the fear of your probity? Do you mean that you would have sold its contents to the press?"

"That would have been a temptation," she confessed, carelessly tapping the keys of her typewriter. "I am a working girl, you know, and am supposed to be well paid at thirty dollars a week. I think that any newspaper in New York would probably give ten thousand dollars for a true account of your conversation with the President and the arrangement at which you arrived. Fancy the clothes I could have bought and the countries I could have visited with ten thousand dollars!"

"Yes," he admitted thoughtfully, "I suppose I was running a certain amount of risk. By the by, I presume it would have been the press with whom you would have dealt?"

"With whom else?" she asked.

"There are others," he observed, watching her keenly, "—politicians, shall we call them?—who would like to know the precise conclusions at which we arrived in Washington yesterday."

"Naturally," she assented.

"Even in Europe," he went on, "this business of secret societies and international espionage is a little on the wane. One nation only continues to use it as her great weapon. In America I never dreamed of coming across anything of the sort. Have I by some chance stumbled upon the unexpected, Miss— I beg your pardon, I have forgotten what you told me your name was."

"I have not told you my name."

"Please repair the omission."

"I do not see the necessity," she objected. "I am a typist from the hotel bureau. You have been unfortunate inasmuch as I am the only one in the office likely to be interested in your mission and its results. Tomorrow you had better ask for some one else. There are two or three there, perhaps not more trustworthy than I, but who will take down anything you dictate without a glimmer of comprehension. I should recommend Miss Bella Fox."

He shook his head. "The name is sufficient," he declared. "I should dislike Miss Bella Fox and I could not dictate to her. I shall ask for you. Tell me how to do so."

"My name is Catherine Borans."

"And if I had dictated to you what I have written with my own hand, what would have been the nature of the risk I should have run?"

"I decline," she said, "to answer your question."

The telephone at her elbow rang while Samara stood scowling down at her. She turned and took the call. As she listened she frowned slightly.

"Tell me your name again, please?" she asked.

The name was apparently repeated. The girl spoke into the transmitter.

"Please wait," she begged. "I will tell Mr. Samara that you are here."

She laid down the receiver and pushed the instrument a little away. Then she turned toward her companion.

"There is a gentleman downstairs who says that his name is Bromley Pride and that he has called from the New York *Comet* to see you."

Samara nodded. "That is quite in order," he assented. "He can come up. Please tell him so."

She did not at once obey. She was evidently perplexed.

"Since you are so much interested in my affairs," her companion continued, "I will tell you that the President himself, looking upon the paper which I understand Mr. Bromley Pride represents, as his official mouthpiece, has suggested that I confide to him a certain portion of the result of our negotiations."

"Indeed," she murmured.

"Recognizing to the full," he went on, with a faint note of sarcasm in his tone, "and thoroughly appreciating that kindly interest, I would yet point out that this is a matter which is already decided. Will you kindly therefore ask Mr. Pride to step up?"

"I would do so," she replied, dropping her voice a little and holding the telephone receiver still farther away, "but, as a matter of fact, he is not there."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I happen to know Mr. Bromley Pride quite well," she explained. "I am also very well acquainted with his voice. The man who is impersonating him downstairs is a stranger!"

GABRIEL SAMARA seemed for a moment to be puzzled and unable to appreciate the significance of his companion's words.

"In any case," he rejoined, "beg whoever is down there to come up. Mr. Pride has probably sent a substitute."

Catherine leaned over the instrument with expressionless face.

"Is it Mr. Bromley Pride himself speaking?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You are to come up, then."

She laid down the receiver without remark.

"Well?" Samara demanded impatiently.

"The man who is below insists that he is Mr. Bromley Pride," she announced.

"And you still don't believe him?"

"I know that he is not," she replied. "I have worked for Mr. Bromley Pride. We are old acquaintances."

"Some journalistic dodge, perhaps," he muttered.

She began gathering together the paraphernalia connected with her machine.

"It is not my business," she continued quietly, "to offer you advice. I am not sure that I am disposed to do so, but as a matter of common sense I must say that I wonder at your admitting to your apartment a man who is visiting you under a false name when you have a document, presumably of some interest to the world, lying there on your desk."

Samara looked at her with wide-open eyes.

"But, my dear young lady," he protested, "we are in the very center of civilization. This is New York!"

"A city of which you are evidently extremely ignorant."

Her attitude suddenly inspired him with disquietude. He began to reflect. "There are some people, of course," he muttered, "who would give the price of a kingdom to know this before I got home. But surely—here—"

She interrupted him.

"Mr. Samara," she said quietly, "I have read several biographies of you. In every one of them, the chronicler has observed that, for a diplomatist of world-wide fame, you were possessed of a remarkably unsuspicious nature. I agree with your chroniclers. Good morning."

"Stop!" he begged her.

There was the sound of the bell. It was rung in quite an ordinary manner, but to both of them there seemed to be something sinister in its drawn-out summons. She looked at him.

"Your servant?"

"He is sitting with my secretary, Andrew Kroupki."

"I will answer the door," she said.

"And remain, if you please," he insisted.

She turned away, threw open the outside door, and returned a moment later, ushering in a visitor. She made no comment as she stood aside to let him pass, but both she and Samara himself studied the newcomer curiously. He was a pleasant-looking man, neatly dressed, with an amiable expression, and the shoulders of an athlete. He carried a black portfolio under his arm, which he set down carefully upon the table, close to the typewriter, before proceeding to introduce himself. His voice, when he spoke, was distinctly a home product and free from any foreign accent.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Samara," he said, as he gripped the latter's hand. "This is an honor I appreciate very highly."

Samara motioned his visitor toward a chair, wondering meanwhile at his quickly conceived dislike of the man.

"I must tell you, Mr. Pride," he explained, "that my own desire was to have kept absolutely secret the nature of my negotiations with your government until I had had an opportunity of setting them before my advisers in Moscow. Your President, however, thought that complete reticence as to my mission would be too much to ask of your press and that therefore an idea of the arrangement concluded had better be given to a representative journal such as your own."

"Quite so," the visitor murmured. "My paper holds almost an official position here."

"May I ask what post you occupy on it?" Samara inquired.

"I am a member of the Board," was the prompt reply. "I am also editorial writer on international affairs."

"And your name is Pride?"

"Yes—James D. Bromley Pride. You can speak right out to me. No need to keep a thing back!"

A QUIET voice from the other end of the room suddenly intervened. The words themselves seemed harmless enough, but their effect was cataclysmic.

"There is surely some mistake. Mr. Bromley Pride of the New York *Comet* is in Philadelphia."

Samara himself was a little taken aback by the unexpected intervention of his temporary secretary. The expression on his visitor's face was momentarily illuminative.

"Who is this?" he demanded sharply.

"My name is Catherine Borans," was the composed reply. "I belong to the typewriting bureau downstairs. I have often worked for Mr. Pride. You are not he."

The pseudo Mr. Pride had regained his presence of mind. He pointed to the card which he had laid upon the table.

"This young woman's interference is impertinent and absurd," he declared. "If I am not Bromley Pride of the New York *Comet*, how is it that I am here at all? I received my instructions from the editor himself this morning."

Samara looked across toward Catherine.

"Telephone the editor of the New York *Comet*," he directed. "Ask him to send some one round to identify this gentleman I do not wish to be offensive," he went on, turning to his visitor, "but your identity is a matter upon which I must be entirely assured."

The sang-froid of this caller of disputed personality was amazing. Before Catherine could take off the receiver he stepped quickly toward the telephone and faced them both.

"The young lady has spoken the truth," he confessed. "I am not Bromley Pride. I am, as a matter of fact, the representative of a rival newspaper. You do not need to be told, Mr. Samara, that here in New York a live journalist will go further than assume another man's name to get hold of a big beat—and then some! He will risk more even than being thrown down eleven flights of stairs! Is there any price you are inclined to name, sir, for the particulars which you were about to hand to the New York *Comet?*"

Samara's eyes flashed and his frown was menacing.

"An impostor!" he exclaimed. "I request you to withdraw at once from my apartment."

"And I decline," was the prompt reply. "I may tell you right away that I am prepared to go to any length to secure this information from you."

"Indeed," Samara scoffed. "May I ask in what direction you propose to make your effort?"

The visitor stretched his hand backward and, from one of the folds of that harmless-looking black portfolio which he had left propped against the typewriter, he drew out an automatic pistol of particularly sinister appearance. His mask of amiability had gone. There was a malicious gleam in his eyes, a cruel twist to his mouth.

"Gabriel Samara," he announced, "I am no journalist at all. I am, as a matter of fact, in another line of business altogether. It is up to me to discover what arrangements you have come to with the President, and how far such arrangements are going to help you with your plans in Russia. I do not desire to alarm either you or the young lady, but I am going to have the truth."

SAMARA smiled contemptuously. There was not a flicker of expression in Catherine's face.

"Pray set your mind at ease so far as we are concerned," he begged. "Neither the young lady nor I am in the least alarmed at your braggadocio. As a matter of curiosity," he went on, "supposing I were disposed to submit to this highway robbery, how do you know that I should tell you the truth?"

The intruder pointed to the typewriter and to the written sheets on the desk.

"There is only one task upon which you could be engaged this morning," he said. "I guess those sheets will do for me, anyway."

"And supposing by any remote chance I should refuse to give them to you," Samara persisted, "is it your purpose, may I ask, to assassinate me?"

"To be candid, yes," was the blunt reply. "But for the fear of canonizing you in your own country, you would have been assassinated long ago. Today things are different. Even Russia can spare you. Let the young lady fetch the papers and hand them to me."

"The young lady will do nothing of the sort," Samara declared firmly. "So much of the result of my mission as I propose to make public at present you can read in the New York *Comet* tomorrow. Now, if it is your intention to assassinate me, you had better get on with it."

The gun was slowly raised to a horizontal position. The face of the man behind it was hideously purposeful.

"What you don't realize," he said deliberately, "is that I am in earnest. You are a marked man, Gabriel Samara, less popular in your own country than you were and hated in mine. Sooner or later this would have been your end anyway, but listen—I'm telling you—your time has come, unless you place those papers on the table in front of you—before I count five. Before I count five, mind, or I shall shoot!"

Samara looked around the room quickly. There was no fear in his face, only the reasonable search of a man who loves life, for some means of escape. There was none which he could apprehend. His assailant was between him and the bell, and the breaking of a window on the eleventh floor—even if it attracted any attention in the street—would be unlikely to bring help in time. All the while the young woman behind the typewriter was watching him, with steady eyes and unmoved expression.

"One—two—three—four—"

"I shouldn't worry," her quiet voice interrupted soothingly. "That gun will not hurt you."

There was a second's stupefaction, then the sound of a harmless click. The silence which followed seemed intolerable, broken though it was in a matter of moments by the piercing shrillness of the whistle which Catherine held to her lips. For the first time Samara himself was dumfounded; so was his would-be murderer, who was staring open-mouthed at his useless weapon.

"You see," the young woman who had so dominated the situation explained to Samara, "this bungling conspirator—really he ought to take a lesson from one of the novelists—put down his satchel behind the cover of my typewriter, having opened it himself first—to get at his gun easily, I suppose. I saw the glitter, so while he was indulging in one of his little bursts of eloquence, I slipped out the cartridge roll."

She held it up. Outside there was the sound of a key in the door.

"I have a smaller gun of the same pattern at home myself, so I understand all about them," she went on equably. "By the by, I hope you don't think I was blowing that whistle for its musical properties. It belongs to the hotel detective. What are you going to say to him?"

The door was thrown open and a stalwart, broad-shouldered man entered hastily. He was in plain clothes but the stamp of officialdom was unmistakable.

"I'M BROWN, the hotel detective," the newcomer announced sharply. "What's wrong here?"

The pseudo Mr. Pride shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"I'm a free-lance journalist," he declared. "Have connections with half a dozen New York papers. I wanted Mr. Samara's news and I tried to bluff him into giving it to me."

"A little more than that, I fancy," Samara observed. "There wasn't much bluff about your automatic."

"Are you carrying firearms?" the detective asked.

The man who called himself Pride handed over his gun.

"I'm through," he confessed. "If I could have bluffed Mr. Samara into giving me a report of his interview in Washington yesterday it would have been worth fifty thousand dollars to me. I failed and I guess it's up to me to take the consequences."

The detective was impressed but noncommittal. He appealed to Samara.

"Is this all there is to it?" he inquired.

Samara shook his head. "The man threatened to assassinate me and appeared to be in earnest," he replied. "If the young lady there had not withdrawn the cartridges from his automatic pistol, he would probably have done so. I do not believe that he is a journalist at all. It is, I imagine, a political affair."

The detective turned to Catherine. Her deep brown eyes were filled with what appeared to be amazement. She shook her head.

"Mr. Samara was naturally alarmed," she said, "but I do not believe that he was in any actual danger."

The detective looked quickly from one to another of the three people in the little tableau. Their faces were an interesting study. Both Samara and his would-be assassin were obviously surprised; the latter, however, quickly concealed his emotion.

"You don't think that he meant business, then?" the detective asked.

"My impression is that he was only bluffing," was the confident reply.

"Then why did you blow that whistle?" her questioner persisted.

"I am rather a nervous person," she confided. "I hated the thought that there might be trouble while I was in the room."

Samara's astonishment was genuine and sincere. He came a little farther into the center of the apartment and stood looking down at Catherine.

"You didn't hear the click, then, when he pulled the trigger of his gun?"

"Did he pull it?" she asked. "Well, after all, it wasn't loaded."

He pointed to the roll of cartridges.

"But you admitted yourself that you took those out of his gun."

She smiled enigmatically. "This has been rather a shock to you, hasn't it?" she said. "I was quite worked up myself. I think we probably took the whole matter too seriously."

The self-styled journalist, who, during the last few moments, had been suffering from an amazement equal to Samara's, recovered himself and played up to his cue.

"Of course," he declared, "it is ridiculous to imagine that the whole thing was more than a bluff. I wanted the news and I failed. Well, there you are! Fine or prison, it's all the same to me. I'll pay the price!"

"Have you any charge to offer, sir?" the detective inquired of Samara.

The latter considered the matter under its new aspect.

"If you will undertake," he stipulated, "to keep that man under surveillance until I am out of the country, that will satisfy me. I am convinced, however, that he is a dangerous person and, notwithstanding all that has been said, I am also convinced that he is capable of making a deliberate attempt upon my life. Under the circumstances, however, I can make no charge. If you take my advice you will inquire into his antecedents and his connection with journalism. You may be surprised."

The detective was inclined to be disappointed at this tame conclusion to the affair.

"I guess we'll take you to headquarters," he decided, turning to Bromley Pride's impersonator. "The magistrate can ask you a few questions and we'll have you bound over. I'll take care of your gun if you don't mind, and you can hand me over those cartridges, young lady. Will you go with us, Mr. Samara, and state your case?"

Samara shook his head. "In the face of the young lady's statements," he observed dryly, "I don't think that my evidence is necessary. Do what you will about the man."

The detective and his charge left the room. As the latter neared the threshold he looked curiously back at Catherine. Her face, however, was inscrutable. The door closed upon them. Samara and his temporary secretary were alone. The former took a cigarette and lit it.

"MISS BORANS," he began, "will you permit me to thank you for having saved my life, and then, unless you wish me to die of curiosity, will you tell me at once why you gave false evidence to the detective and placed me in a rather absurd position?"

Catherine continued her task of collecting her belongings.

"If you have no more work for me," she said, "the office will be expecting me to report. They will charge you for this extra half-hour as it is."

Samara frowned. "I engaged you for the day," he declared.

"You must arrange that with Miss Loyes," she replied coldly. "I have an assignment at three o'clock."

He took up the telephone receiver.

"Typewriting bureau—urgent," he demanded. "Good. . . . Mr. Samara speaking. Can I secure the services of the young lady who is with me now for the rest of the day? . . . Good! . . . Certainly."

He replaced the receiver and turned round with a faint smile of triumph.

"You belong to me for the day," he announced.

Her fingers strayed over the keys of her machine.

"My secretarial accomplishments," she reminded him, "not my confidence."

Samara had never been more than a casual observer of women, had never studied them intimately, certainly had never appreciated them. Other passions had lain more closely intertwined with his life. He scrutinized Catherine for the first time with half-reluctant interest, realizing the finer qualities of her, the delicate femininity, coupled with a remarkable self-reliance. He realized, too, that in the subtlest of all ways she was beautiful.

"Did you know that assassin whose cause you suddenly espoused with such vigor?" he asked a little abruptly.

"I never saw him before in my life," she declared.

"Then in the name of wonder," he begged, "tell me why you chose to sit there and tell deliberate falsehoods for his sake."

"It happened to amuse me," she observed, smiling. "After all, you have nothing to complain of. I saved your life and subsequently I prevented your taking vengeance upon your would-be murderer. We might call it quits, I think."

Samara was immensely perplexed. He frowned down at her moodily.

"Sheer sentimentality," he muttered. "I hate cutthroats. It's a dirty business shooting at unarmed men."

"He wasn't a pleasant person," she agreed. "I disliked his mouth and the color of his tie. Shall we decide to forget him? . . . I am at your disposal for the rest of the day. Have you letters to give me?"

He shrugged his shoulders. It was a novelty, this, to find a woman with a will as strong as his own. Then he glanced at his watch.

"I have to go out for half an hour," he announced. "I shall be glad if you will arrange the typewritten sheets I gave you and pin in the pages I wrote by hand in the proper order."

She looked at him in surprise.

"But this is the document all the trouble has been about!" she exclaimed. "I might read it!"

He crossed the room to the desk where he had been writing, collected the sheets and brought them over to her.

"My dear young lady," he said, "you are welcome to read my little contribution—if you can."

She studied the closely written pages with an apparently puzzled air.

"So that is Russian," she remarked.

He nodded. "Looks terrible, doesn't it? Here is my servant back again. . . . Ivan, bring me my coat and hat and watch over this young lady while I am away. With Ivan Rortz about the place," he continued, "no one will be likely to disturb you. I shall give orders outside, too, that no visitors are permitted to enter."

She was still gazing at those sheets filled with strange-looking words.

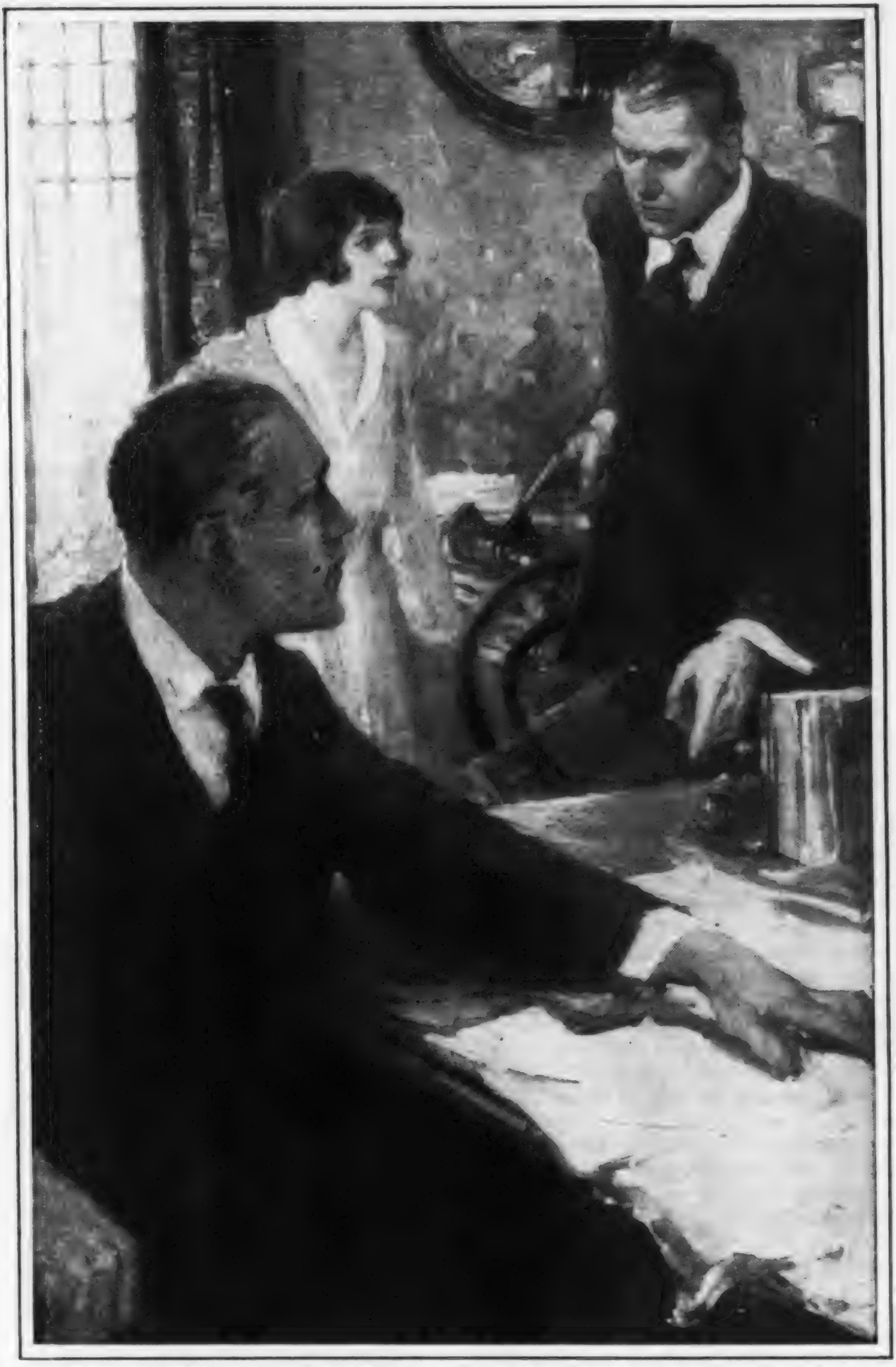
"Very well," she assented, "I will have this all in order by the time you get back."

TO ALL appearances nothing had happened when Samara returned from his visit to a great banking house in Wall Street. He gave his coat and hat to Ivan, who was sitting—a grim, silent figure—in the little hall. Then he passed into the inner room where Catherine, having apparently completed her task, was leaning back in her chair, turning over the pages of the document which she had pinned together.

"Well?" he asked with sardonic pleasantry. "Did you make anything out of it?"

She laid it down and glanced up at him. "Naturally," she replied. "I read it."

"But the Russian part?"



Samara smiled contemptuously. "Pray set your mind at ease so far as we are concerned," he begged. "Neither the young lady nor I am alarmed at your braggadocio."

She nodded. "The Russian part, of course. It was the most interesting."

He stared at her. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "You can't read Russian?"

She laughed. "What an accusation!"

For a moment he looked at her. All the time he had been troubled by a sense of a vague likeness; not, perhaps, to any particular person, but to a type.

"Surely you told me that you were an American?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Oh, no!" she replied. "I told you that I had lived in America for twenty-three years."

"Then what are you?"

"As much a Russian as you are," she assured him, smiling.

SAMARA, for a great statesman and undoubtedly a great ruler, was a man of unsuspicious temperament and had more than once committed what might have turned out to be diplomatic blunders. He was also, however, at all times a man of action. He locked the door behind him, drew a chair in front of the telephone and sat facing the young lady whom he had engaged to be his secretary for the day.

"I think," he said, "we will have an explanation."

She smiled graciously. "As I now know exactly the arrangements you have made with the government of this country," she remarked, "I am perfectly willing to tell you anything you want to know."

"In the first place, then," he asked, "are you a spy, and, if you are, in whose interests are you working?"

"I am nothing of the sort," she assured him. "I am in effect exactly what I seem to be. I am a young woman of New York City of scanty means, earning a living by typewriting and secretarial work."

"But you are Russian?"

"My father and mother were both Russians," she acknowledged. "I recognize it as my country. I have lived here all my life, however."

"We are getting on," he said. "Is Borans your real name?"

"A sufficient portion of it," she answered. "The rest of it is not important."

"Will you explain to me," he went on, "why you first saved my life and then behaved so strangely with regard to my would-be murderer?"

"Now that I have read this document," she said, touching it with her fingers, "I am disposed to explain to you. I am not a spy in any sense of the word, but I am a patriotic Russian. I belong to a little circle of Russians living here, who are filled with one idea as regards our country. We have not even the dignity of being a secret society. Every one knows everything about us and every one laughs at us. We look upon you with respect but as a very obstructive person."

"Upon me?" he exclaimed. "And you call yourself a patriot! Don't dare to tell me that you are a Bolshevist!"

"I am not," she replied indignantly. "I am free to confess that you have wiped Russia clean of a great curse. You have done a splendid work but you have not done it our way."

"What in God's name are you, then?" he asked impatiently. "What party do you represent? I have dragged Russia out of the slough. I have reëstablished her institutions, her economic position. Already she is lifting her head among the nations of the world."

"I admit all that freely," she acknowledged. "It is because I realize what Russia owes you that you are alive. I do not wish, however, to tell you any more at present about myself and my political views. I saved your life because I believed that you are still necessary to Russia; but in a certain sense, I and your would-be assassin are alike. We share one great grievance against you. We resent—or perhaps some might say fear—your great scheme of demilitarization."

Samara laughed a little harshly.

"Really," he said, "I never imagined that life in New York could be so interesting. The atmosphere of this room, however, is getting on my nerves. I have been through all I can stand for one morning. I can hear the click of that wicked-looking pistol even now. Young lady, where are your friends? Why do I not know them? I thought most of the Russians in New York who had aims or views had been to see me."

She shook her head.

"Not all," she told him. "There are still a few of us who hold aloof."

"Miss Borans," he invited, "will you do me the honor of taking lunch with me?"

She rose to her feet with alacrity.

"Not in the hotel," she begged. "It isn't allowed. Anywhere else, with great pleasure. I warn you, though, that my morning's work has given me an absurd appetite."

"I shall be proud to minister to it," he assured her.

THEY lunched at a secluded table in the balcony of the Ritz-Carlton. Gabriel Samara, like many another man whose life is immersed in his work, and who finds himself committed to an unusual action in his everyday routine, was conscious of a curious light-heartedness. He felt as if he were a schoolboy at play. He, Gabriel Samara, taking his companion of a morning to luncheon in a restaurant!

"It intrigues me," she remarked, "to think that notwithstanding all your diplomats here and Mr. Bromley Pride of the New York *Comet*—who, by the by, telephoned to say that he is on his way back from Philadelphia and will see you this afternoon—I am the only person in the world with whom you can discuss the result of your mission to Washington."

"What I shall do with you, I can't imagine," he groaned. "Everything will come out in due course, naturally, but premature disclosure before I get back might do an enormous amount of harm. I have a very strenuous opposition to face, as you may realize."

"You need not be afraid," she assured him. "If you are really going to give me lobster newburg I shall keep your secret! I warn you if I thought that disclosure would aid our own cause, not all the precious stones in your mines could have kept me silent, nor all the gold which will soon be flowing into your banks. As it is you are safe."

"That is something to be thankful for at any rate," he declared. "Miss Borans, treat me with confidence. You interest me. Let us talk frankly. If indeed you are a patriotic Russian, and have studied in any way the history of our times, you will know that I too am one. Wherein does my policy of reconstruction differ from yours? Why don't you approve of demilitarization? Why should I consent to my country keeping under arms the greatest war machine in Europe to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for another nation?"

"There I agree," she admitted. "There must be no more wars."

"But for my errand here," he continued, "there would have been war within a few years. You cannot keep four million men under arms indefinitely without trouble. If you knew the tension at the present moment, the stream of proposals, the envoys who have been continually sent to me!"

She nodded. "Don't tell me too much about them," she warned him. "You might find that I am not so much on your side as you think."

"But this demilitarization," he persisted. "You must approve of that. We have three perfectly trained armies, of a million men each, ready to fight at a moment's notice. Why? You know why, and so do I. Isn't it a sane thing to disband a million according to my arrangements, now that I have been able to obtain a credit in Washington for the reconstruction of the industries for which we can use their labor? Think! In six months' time, not a man of that million will be bearing arms. They will be miners, or on the land, working in factories, on the railways, or road-making, just according to their natural bent. Why, it's blood and bone in the country; a million productive toilers instead of a million wastrels!"

"Theoretically I agree," she acknowledged. "It is because I agree that I saved your life."

"Then why did you save him?" he demanded bluntly.

"Because, although our point of view and ultimate aim are entirely different," she replied, "your would-be assassin stands, in a sense, for the same things that we do."

Samara gave the waiter an order and leaned back in his place.

"Explain," he insisted. "In as few words as possible, please. I am weary of not understanding."

"Why should I explain?" Catherine murmured. "It is all very simple. We grant you that you have lifted Russia out of the slough, but we do not believe that your methods, that your system of government will place her back where she has a right to be."

THE light broke in upon him then. "I see!" he exclaimed. "Who are your friends here? Can I meet them?"

A sudden deepening of the little lines at the corners of her eyes and the twitching of her lips betrayed a genuine amusement.

"What a sensation I should cause if I took you to see them!" she laughed. "I see their faces when I present you! It would be amazing!"

"Risk it," he begged. "Why not? I am proud to look any Russian patriot in the face and tell him who I am."

She was interested.

"Yes, I suppose you do feel like that," she observed, after a moment's pause. 'Why shouldn't you? Sometimes I, myself, make almost a hero of you. I'm quite sure that I shall always be proud to think that I have lunched with the great Samara. I shall be grateful, too, for other reasons. Do you find me very greedy?"

"Delightfully so," he admitted. "All healthy people are greedy. The vice of it only creeps in with the lack of self-restraint."

"I suppose," she remarked, "my manners are good; but if you only knew how I longed to see whether he has remembered the olives with the chicken! . . . Hold tight to your chair now, please, and prepare for a shock. I am going to ask you a sickeningly obvious question. Tell me how you like America."

Gabriel Samara looked around him thoughtfully. He answered the spirit which prompted the question rather than the question itself.

"I venerate America," he declared. "Why shouldn't I? In a sense I am the champion of modern democracy. America is a shining light to all other nations, yet I maintain that Russia with its unified population has a better chance of reaching the supreme heights."

"I sometimes wonder," she sighed, "whether the true spirit of a republic can flourish in a land which knows such terrible extremes of wealth and poverty."

"It is a drawback," he agreed. "That is where we in Russia have an advantage. We are framing a new constitution. Our laws are adapted to meet existing circumstances. Communism is dead, but we shall never tolerate the multimillionaire."

"Do you think," she asked, "that Germany will ever let you become really powerful?"

"Not willingly," he replied; "but the monarchical sentiment in Germany is not strong enough yet to upset the government of the country. Germany, of course, will bitterly resent the success of my mission over here, but she will have to get rid of her republic before we need take the war scare seriously."

She looked at him across the table. "Do you think that the monarchist party in Germany is gaining ground?" she asked.

"I know little about German internal affairs," he answered evasively. "I have more than enough to do to keep in touch with the trend of opinion in my own country."

The thread of conversation appeared to be suddenly broken. Samara began to ask questions about the people by whom they were surrounded. The restaurant on this fine spring day seemed like a great nosegay of brilliant flowers. Three-quarters of the guests were women and it was a season of abandonment in color, with yellow and pink predominating. New York, no less than Paris, was a city of subtle perfumes, cunningly distilled and exotic. Samara, smoking his cigarette with the air of an epicure, found much to interest him in his environment.

"These people are like Russians in one way," he remarked. "They spend their money."

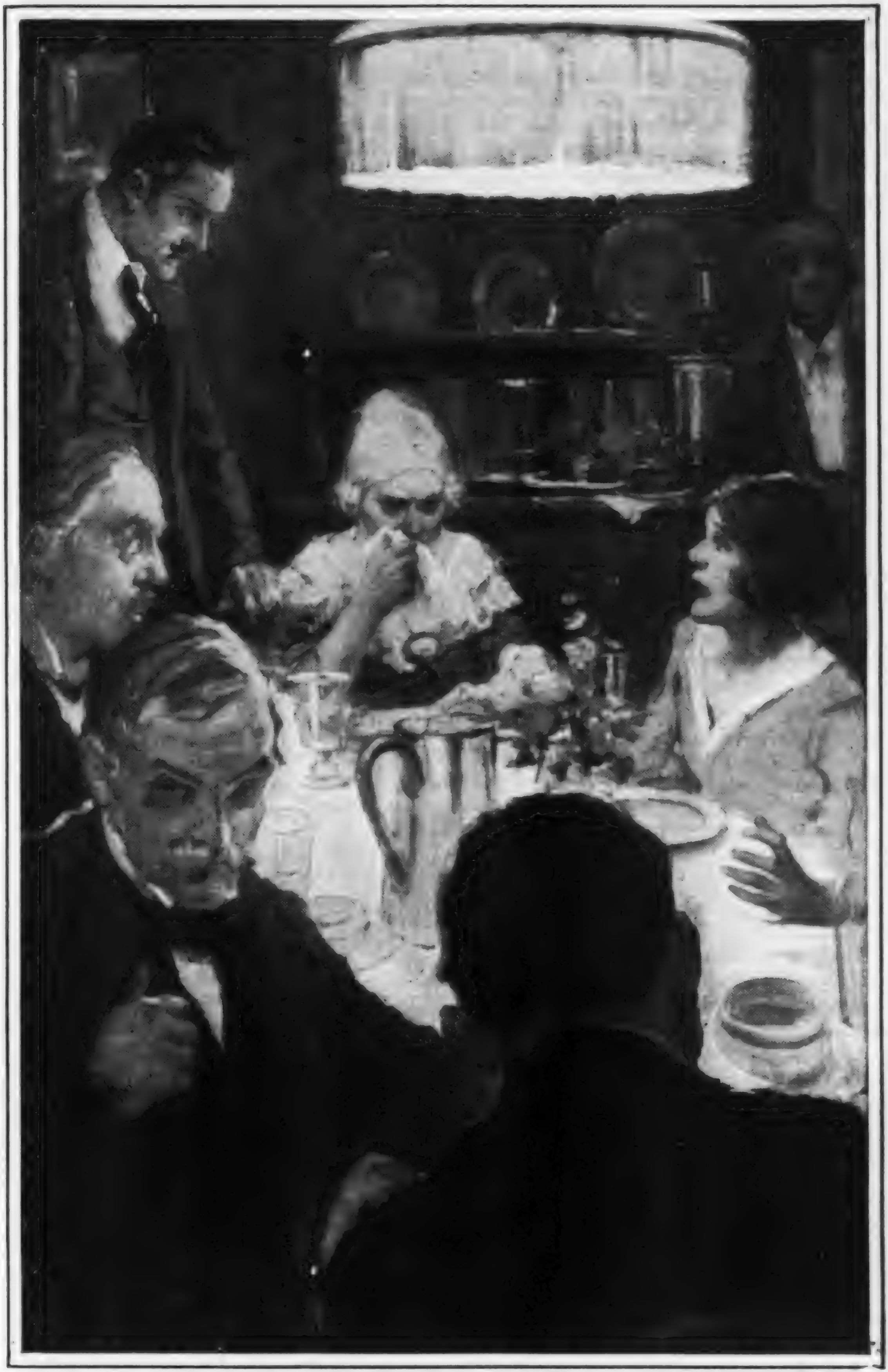
"I have a German friend here," she confided, "who argues that there is always more extravagance under a republic. His point is that the bourgeoisie make money easily and spend it readily. The aristocrat who has to keep up a great appearance is compelled to be the more miserly of the two, apart even from the question of good taste."

"Is this the prelude to a discussion upon the ethics of government?" he suggested, smiling.

"Indeed, no," she replied. "I am not so presumptuous. My principles are matters of instinct with me. I do not argue about them. I accept them."

She helped herself to one of his proffered cigarettes and he paid the bill.

"QUITE the monarchical touch," he observed. "If you are postponing your return to your native land, however, until there is a czar upon the throne I am afraid you are doomed to a very long spell of homesickness."



"Of all men," Catherine asked, "with whom do you think I lunched? With Gabriel Samara!" A thunderbol through the roof could scarcely have created a greater sensation.

"Who knows?" she exclaimed carelessly. "Revolutions are rather the fashion just now. I may return to find you in chains and the knout cracking once more."

She had spoken lightly enough, but he chose to take her seriously.

"As a matter of fact," he confided, "there is a certain amount of very disquieting truth in what you say. I have stamped out bolshevism in Russia forever. The spirit of anarchistic communism, at any rate, is dead, but I honestly believe that, especially among the peasantry, there is an unwholesome sort of craving for the burdens of czardom."

"That is almost the most interesting thing that you have said," she remarked as they rose to go. "Thanks very much for my wonderful luncheon. Do you really require my services this afternoon?"

"Without a doubt," he insisted. "I am going on from here to pay a call. At four o'clock I shall be back in my rooms. Let me find you there, if you please."

They were about to part in the hallway of the restaurant, when Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington intervened. She sailed down upon them with the air of taking both into custody; ample, yet fashionably dressed, a triumph of artificiality, forty, or perhaps fifty, lisping with the ingenuousness of childhood.

"Well, well, is this where you young women who earn your living lunch as a rule?" she exclaimed, gripping the none too willing hand of Samara's companion. "Every time I've asked you to make up one of our little luncheon parties here, Catherine, you have told me that you couldn't play idle rich on work days."

Catherine presented the appearance of a young person of good breeding, striving to be polite while in bodily pain.

"Today is an exception," she said. "I am lunching with a fellow countryman."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington smiled graciously. She had just sufficient discernment, born of her social cravings, to appreciate distinction even when it did not conform to type. Catherine, with a deprecating glance at her companion, murmured his name. Samara bowed—a little lower perhaps than was usual in a city where hand-shaking is almost sacramental. He did not seem to notice, however, the pearl-gloved hand so frankly extended.

"Mr. Gabriel Samara, who has come over from Russia to see our President?" Mrs. Bossington exclaimed breathlessly.

"My name," he replied, "is Gabriel Samara. I know of no other. I have just come from Washington, where your President was good enough to receive me."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington was naïvely delighted to meet such a personage and she made no effort to conceal her excitement.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Samara, right now," she declared, "that you've met the one woman in New York who has read every line that's been written about you since you landed and who has been just crazy to meet you. This is going to be wonderful. Catherine's bringing you tonight, of course?"

"I beg your pardon," he observed, genuinely perplexed. "I have not the honor—"

"Catherine? Miss Borans, of course. You will come tonight with her? It's the meeting, you know. Why, it will be great! Prince Nicholas is coming, General Orenburg, Colonel Kirdorff, the dear Grand Duchess—all of them! It's most opportune!"

Samara turned to his companion. He was guilty of a gross breach of manners. He addressed her in Russian.

"What is this woman talking about?" he demanded.

MRS. BOSSINGTON was delighted. She rippled on before Catherine had had a chance to reply.

"Such a wonderful language!" she exclaimed. "Sometimes they talk it in conclave and I can assure you, Mr. Samara, it just thrills me. Some people call it harsh. I love it. Don't you think, Catherine dear," she went on, her tone becoming almost wheedling, "that you could persuade Mr. Samara to come a little earlier and dine with us first tonight—just a very small affair—twenty covers or so? Joseph would be so pleased!"

Catherine laid her hand upon the arm of her loquacious acquaintance.

"Mrs. Bossington," she said, "I am afraid you don't quite understand. Mr. Samara is a Russian, of course, and a very distinguished one, but his aims are scarcely the aims of our friends. I do not think we should agree. It never even occurred to me to bring Mr. Samara to the meeting."

Mrs. Bossington couldn't understand this.

"My dear," she cried, "you're crazy! There you are, a dozen of you, all Russians out of a home and out of a country and longing to get back again. And here's the very man who can help you! Get together and talk it over. I'm only thankful it's my turn to entertain you. I should be the proudest woman in New York to think that Mr. Samara had paid me a visit. If we could only fix up that dinner!"

Gabriel Samara was a little weary. His eyes were straying through the windows to the sunlit streets. The close almosphere of the lounge, the heavy perfumes, the din of conversation were beginning to nauseate him.

"I have a call to make in the hotel, Miss Borans," he reminded her. "If you and Mrs.—Mrs. Bossington, I believe—will excuse me I will take my leave. The Ambassador from my country is expecting me at half-past two."

His would-be hostess gripped him by the arm.

"Not one step do you move from here," she insisted, "until you have promised to come and see these good people tonight."

"So far as that is concerned," he replied, "I am in Miss Borans's hands. If it is her wish—if they are country people of mine who desire to meet me—I shall be charmed."

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington had attained her object. She saw some friends to whom it was necessary that she should immediately communicate the fact that she had been discussing Russian politics with Mr. Gabriel Samara. With a little shower of farewells she departed. Catherine glanced up at her companion. There was something of mutual comprehension in their smile.

"It appears to be our fate to spend the evening together," he remarked.

"We shall see," she murmured. "Shall I expect you about four?"

"I shall not be later," he promised her. . . .

Samara watched his departing companion as she passed through the little throng of gossiping women on her way to the street. Among all this flamboyant elegance, these vivid splashes of color and elaborate toilettes, there was something almost aloof in her still drabness—her disdain of all those freely displayed arts. Yet, so far as sheer femininity was concerned, Samara felt the spell of her so strongly that not one of the many attractive women by whom he was surrounded, several of whom looked at him with friendly curiosity, appeared in any way comparable to her. He watched her disappear, and turned back into the hotel to keep an appointment with the Ambassador of his country, who had followed him from Washington the night before. His eagerness for the approaching discussion, however, had suddenly evaporated.

"I am after all a pagan," he muttered, as he stepped into the elevator to make his call. "For the moment I had forgotten Russia."

CATHERINE, on her return to Samara's suite at the Hotel Weltmore, found the sofa in the sitting-room occupied by a young man who stared at her with curious eyes as she entered. He was tall, phenomenally thin and phenomenally sallow. The hollows in his cheeks were so pronounced that the higher bones themselves seemed to be almost on the point of pushing their way through the flesh. His coal-black hair was long and disheveled, and his unshaven condition added to the wildness of his appearance. Catherine, with the instinct of her sex, took note only of his obvious ill-health, and her tone as she addressed him was kindly.

"You must be Andrew Kroupki, Mr. Samara's secretary," she said, removing the cover from her typewriter. "Mr. Samara scarcely expected that you would be well enough to get up today."

"I cannot lie in bed here," he declared feebly. "I become nervous. It is terrible to be ill so far from home. There is only Ivan, and Ivan hates me."

"Why should he do that?" she asked soothingly.

"Because he and I live closest to the chief," was the impatient reply. "Ivan is jealous. He is very foolish. It is his strength which protects, and my brains. We are allies but he will not have it so. Have you been working for the chief?"

"All the morning," she answered. "I still have a long list of invitations to decline. He is returning at four o'clock."

"Do you know anything about a dispatch for Cherbourg?" he continued. "My brain was on fire this morning. I could not even ask."

"The dispatch is finished and Mr. Samara took it away with him," she confided. "Part of it I typed and the more important part he wrote in by hand."

The young man closed his eyes for a moment.

"It is terrible to be like this," he groaned, "when one is needed."

She rose from her seat and came over to the couch, laid her hand for a moment upon his head and felt his pulse.

"Have you seen a doctor?" she inquired.

He nodded. "Yes. I am taking some medicine. He told me to lie in bed and let my brain rest."

"Would you like a drink? Some iced water?"

He made a little grimace. "I hate it," he muttered. "In Russia we do not drink water."

She drew a vial of eau-de-cologne from her bag, soaked her handkerchief with it and laid it upon his head.

"That is very pleasant," he sighed gratefully.

"I wonder," she said, "would you care for some tea—tea with lemon, freshly made and clear-colored?"

"Wonderful!" he assented eagerly.

She sent for the floor waiter, procured some materials, and busied herself for a few minutes with the equipage which he brought. The young man sipped the beverage when she handed it to him with something approaching ecstasy.

"I have had nothing like this since the fever came," he told her. "What is your name?"

"Catherine Borans."

He looked at her with wide-open eyes. Already there was a gleam of something more than admiration in them.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"The Weltmore Typewriting Bureau, downstairs," she replied. "Now, try to go to sleep for a little time. Do you think that the sound of the typewriter will disturb you? If so, I will write some of these letters by hand. I do not think that Mr. Samara would mind."

He shook his head. "It will not disturb me," he assured her. "I should like to lie here and watch you work. You are a very wonderful person. Are you an American?"

She smiled. "You are not to talk any more," she enjoined. "Close your eyes and try to sleep."

"I like to watch you," he murmured.

CATHERINE was a person unafflicted with self-consciousness, so she continued her work methodically, although every time she looked up she found his eyes upon her.

"More tea," he begged once.

She gave him another cup, and renewed the eau-de-cologne on her handkerchief. Presently he closed his eyes, and when Samara returned he was sleeping peacefully.

"You didn't tell me that I was to be hospital nurse as well as typist," she remarked, speaking in an undertone.

Samara crossed the room and looked down at the young man.

"You've done very well with him," he said. "His respiration is better, the fever is down. What have you been giving him? Tea? It smells very good. I should like to try it myself."

She made some more and he drank it gratefully. He appeared to be a little tired; his interview had not been altogether satisfactory.

"You have the Russian touch for tea," he told her. "There is nothing like it in the world. I drink wine and spirits—everything—but tea like this is better than all."

"And better for you," she observed.

He laughed dryly. "Sometimes its exhilaration is not rapid enough," he said.

The young man stirred in his place. His master's tone was suddenly kind as he turned toward him.

"You are feeling better, Andrew?" he asked in Russian.

"Much better," was the eager reply. "This young lady has been very good to me. Did you find her by accident, sir?"

"By accident," Samara assured him.

"She is intelligent?"

"She is adequate," was the expressionless reply. "I need your help, though, Andrew. Get well quickly."

"I am almost well now," the young man declared, sitting up. "In a few days I shall be able to do anything. It is fortunate for you, master," he went on, still speaking in his own language, "that you hate women."

"I do not hate them," Samara protested. "I simply do not appreciate them."

"You hate them," Andrew repeated emphatically. "Even when you play with them you show it in your manner. It is fortunate for you. This young lady might cause you trouble."

Samara glanced behind uneasily. Catherine was continuing her task with immovable face.

"I am going to take you to your room now, Andrew," he announced. "Your leaving it was against the doctor's orders."

"I am content," the young man assented. "I am very weary but I feel sleep coming."

They crossed the room together, the young man leaning on Samara's arm. At the door he turned back.

"Thank you very much, miss," he said in English.

She smiled. "Get well quickly," she enjoined.

Samara returned a few minutes later. Catherine leaned back in her chair.

"Thank you for being kind to Andrew," he said.

"He seems delicate," she remarked.

"A little neurotic and, I am afraid, consumptive," Samara agreed. "He is the son of one of my great friends, the man who first helped me to fight against the anarchists. When he died I took the lad to work for me. He is able and devoted, but he has exaggerated ideas of everything. Your kindness has been good for him. He is already asleep."

"He is very devoted to you," she said.

"Almost foolishly so," he admitted. "There are times when I have trouble with him. . . . Tell me now about these friends of yours. I see that I was right in my assumption. You and your companions are among those who hope for the impossible things."

"If I may I will explain," Catherine suggested. "My mother died when I was three years old in this country and left as my patroness the exiled Grand Duchess Alexandrina Sophia of Kossas. I have been brought up, therefore, indirectly attached to a strange little circle. Would you really like to know about them?"

"Most certainly," he assured her emphatically. "They are Russians."

"Very well, then," she continued. "There are six of them. We live in an apartment house a long way the other side of Central Park. We all share a sitting-room for purposes of economy. Every one is poor, every one is shabby, every one is miserable. Now, if you wish, I shall tell you about them, one by one."

"If you please," he murmured.

"FIRST of all, then, there is Nicholas Imanoff," she began. "He is the nearest living descendant of the last czar. He is twenty-five years old, was educated with great difficulty at Harvard, and ekes out an embittered existence selling bonds on commission for a New York stock-broking firm. He calls himself Mr. Ronoff, but every one knows who he is, and I think it very probable that the little business he gets is because he appeals to people's curiosity. He is rather bad-tempered, does not take enough exercise, drinks a little more than is good for him, but is quite capable at times of justifying his descent."

"An admirable sketch," Samara declared. "Proceed, please."

"I will speak of my patroness, the Grand Duchess," Catherine continued. "She is a fair, fat old lady of sixty-eight. She dresses abominably, her walk is almost a waddle, she takes no care about her person, and she earns a few dollars a month making artificial roses. She calls herself Mrs. Kossas."

"Less interesting," Samara commented. "Proceed."

"There is Boris Kirdorff," she went on. "Sometimes, I believe, he uses an obsolete title of 'Colonel.' I think that he has more brains than any of the others, and certainly less conscience. He comes from a great family, as I dare say you know. His is a cold unattractive personality, but he is a born schemer and if ever the others have hopes it is through him they are expressed. He is secretary to a very bourgeois card club, but I think the greater part of his small earnings is spent in gambling. General Orenburg is a more pleasing personality, but he is older. He is the only one who has any money, and that is a very small amount. He puts it into the common stock. He spends his whole day at the libraries, and he has fifteen different schemes for bringing about a monarchist rising in Russia."

"Any other young people?" Samara inquired.

"There is Cyril Volynia Sabaroff of

Perm and his sister, Rosa. Cyril is interested in the sale of automobiles. His income varies a great deal, though. Rosa is engaged as reception clerk at a photographer's shop. They are less serious than the rest of us, and, if only they had money, I think they would be content to stay in this country for the remainder of their days. The others of us, as you may have gathered, have only one desire in life, and that is to return to Russia."

"Why not?" Samara observed. "You are all Russians. You have a perfect right to live in your native land."

There was a moment's silence. Catherine was gazing across the top of her typewriter at her companion. Samara was lounging on the other end of the table, his hands in his pockets, a cigar which he had lit without remark, between his lips.

"You seem to forget," she said quietly, "that there is such a thing as a decree of banishment against the absentee aristocracy of Russia."

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed. "Out of date! Antediluvian! I'll revoke it the day I get back. You can consider it revoked now. Mind you," he went on, striking the table a mighty blow with his fist, "there is another decree in Russia which will never be suspended. It is my aim to make Russia the freest country in the world, but if I find an anarchist in café, street or public meeting, he is shot within the hour. Against anarchists the law of Russia is as the law against vermin—death, summary and unquestionable! . . . There is no one else calling himself a Russian who is not welcome to take his place in the community."

"Will you repeat this to my friends?" she asked, and there was very nearly a tremor in her tone.

"Take me to them," he invited.

"I shall call for you at nine o'clock," she promised. "Please let us work now. I feel that I am wasting your time."

IT WAS a dejected, almost a pathetic little crowd that gathered round the sparsely laid dinner table in a back apartment on Amsterdam Avenue. The furniture, the table appointments, the faded carpet on the floor were all according to type. The prospect from the solitary window was of brick and masonry and a jumble of telegraph wires. Occasionally the room shook with the thunder of an elevated train passing near by. A colored servant, whose dress seemed to have been put on in scraps, was serving the meal from the sideboard. There were two jugs of water and a carafe of light beer on the table; in its center a little vase with a handful of cheap flowers. General Orenburg sat at one end and Alexandrina of Kossas at the other. Conversation was scanty. They all appeared to be engrossed in their own thoughts.

"Catherine is late today," Alexandrina observed.

"Catherine is late but here," the young lady in question remarked, opening the door in time to hear the sound of her own name.

They all looked at her with interest. She seemed somehow or other to represent the vitality of the little circle, which brightened visibly at her coming. Kirdorff, whom nothing in this world escaped, watched her curiously, as she took her place. His was a queer, hawklike face with black eyes and indrawn lips. His hair, thin about the temples, and carefully brushed, was unexpectedly light-colored.

"Catherine has something to tell us," he observed.

"I have something very wonderful to tell you," Catherine confessed, as she pushed aside a bowl of very unappetizing soup. "You need not bother about my dinner. I lunched at the Ritz-Carlton, and I shall eat a great many of Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington's sandwiches later on. Listen to me, everybody. Of all men in this world, with whom do you think I lunched? It is absurd to ask you to guess. I lunched with Gabriel Samara!"

A thunderbolt through the roof could scarcely have created a greater sensation. There were exclamations in every key. Then, with the passing of that first wave of astonishment, came a fierce and intense interest. Kirdorff leaned across the table, his fists clenched, his eyes protuberant. The Grand Duchess talked to herself in broken sentences. Nicholas Imanoff spoke.

"How came you to meet Samara?" he demanded.

"In the most natural way possible," Catherine explained. "He telephoned to the bureau for a typist—his secretary has been taken ill. The assignment was given to me. My work pleased him. He invited me to lunch."

"You lunched with that man!" Nicholas muttered.

"There are very few men I wouldn't lunch with at the Ritz-Carlton," Catherine rejoined coolly, "but I will tell you this now of Gabriel Samara. He stands for other principles than ours, but he is a man. He is what Cyril Volynia here, when he came back from England, called a 'sportsman.' We met Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington, and she spoke of tonight. Samara asked me who my Russian friends were, and I told him. Then listen to what he said: 'They are Russians. Why do they live in New York? Why do they not go back to Russia?' "

"Samara said that!" Kirdorff interrupted her.

"Absolutely!" Catherine continued. "I reminded him of the decree of banishment. He scoffed at it. He undertook that it should be revoked. He has told me in plain words that you are all of you free to return to Russia."

There was an almost awed silence. Alexandrina was sobbing quietly into her handkerchief. Kirdorff was drumming upon the table.

"Free to return!" he muttered. "Why not? If one could only breathe there—could live—"

"Or die," General Orenburg interrupted fervently, "so long as it was in Russia!"

"There is surely a living to be made there as well as here," Cyril Volynia declared. "Perhaps my firm would let me open a branch depot at Moscow."

"Listen," Catherine warned them. "You must make up your minds to this. It is necessary and it may lead to great things. You must meet Samara."

The Grand Duchess left off sobbing. The suggestion was so astounding that the words themselves seemed to convey no definite meaning to her.

"Meet Samara!" Kirdorff reflected. "He will want to know our attitude toward his government, of course. He will require pledges."

"I have not the faintest idea what he will say to you," Catherine observed. "I can only tell you this: He is a brave man. He is rash. He is broad-minded. He is ingenuous. He has not the least resemblance to one's idea of a democratic leader."

Nicholas Imanoff looked across the table. There was a note of covert jealousy in his tone.

"Does he know who you are?" he inquired.

"He does not, and I desire that he should not know," she rejoined. "I have spoken to him of Alexandrina of Kossas as my patroness."

"TELL us this," Kirdorff asked quietly, the instincts of the conspirator already stirring within him. "In the course of your work today did you come to any conclusion as to the success or failure of his mission over here? Have you formed any idea as to how far he means to go with this mad scheme of his?"

"We will talk of that later," Catherine replied. "It is better for you to know nothing tonight. What I want you all to remember now is that in half an hour's time we are to leave here, to hold one of our formal meetings under the roof and with the patronage of Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington."

"You are coming with us, Catherine?" the Grand Duchess demanded.

"I am going back to the hotel to fetch Mr. Samara," was that young lady's unexpected rejoinder.

Nicholas half rose to his feet. "I will escort you," he declared.

Catherine smiled at him coldly. "You will do nothing of the sort, Nicholas," she said. "If you take my advice you will remember what I say. So far as Gabriel Samara knows, I am a typist from the Weltmore Secretarial Bureau. It is my wish that he know no more than this. Kindly remember that."

Kirdorff nodded approvingly. "Our little sister knows best," he pronounced.

His work in America finished, Samara sails for Monte Carlo—and on shipboard finds foes just as merciless. Look for the second instalment of E. Phillips Oppenheim's great new serial, in April EVERYBODY'S, out March 14.

Canned Salmon

Circumstances Alter Cases, and the Occasion Sometimes Comes When a Fellow Finds That His Favorite Dish Is the Very One He Thought He Disliked Most

By Stephen Vincent Benét

THE Crosses weren't summer-people—they lived at Sea Beach, and Mr. Cross's grocery kept open all winter. Consequently the chief oceanic delicacy that appeared upon the Cross supper table during the summer was pink canned salmon. It was so tonight, much to Sidney Cross's distaste.

"Gosh, Ma! We havin' that old canned salmon again?"

"Why, what's the matter with it, Sidney? I thought I got one of the new cans," said his mother, abstractedly.

Pearl, on the other side of the table, giggled. She was at the age when giggles are as inevitable as freckles.

"Aw, Ma! Think of Sidney's swell friends! Think of Mrs. Pynchon, Ma!" She imitated, vilely. "Deah, deah, Sidney, my deah, you mussun eat canned salmon—it's un-*re*-fined! Come ovah to the Ritz, my deah, and have a snack of—"

"Aw, you shut up!" said Sidney, and glowered at his plate. But after a minute he returned to the subject.

"All the same, you'd think we could get some fresh fish once in a while," he said.

"Well, Sidney, maybe some Sunday when Pa isn't busy, Gus Oberholtz'd take us out where we could get a mess of cod—"

"Cod!" said Sidney, scornfully, and again Pearl giggled.

"Cod!" she mimicked. "Oh, waitah—waitah—take it away! Lord Sidney's quite disturbed at the very sight of it! Running Lady Pynchon's motorboat has quite put the deah boy off his feed. Oh, waitah! A fresh-boiled lobster for Lady Pynch—"

"*Will* you shut up?" said Sidney, on the point of explosion, and Pearl, knowing the signals eerily well, obeyed. For the rest of the meal they were both as silent as Pa, whose only contribution to the family conversation was an occasional grunt of "Country's going to the devil!" as he breathed into his newspaper.

But after Pearl had been rebelliously impounded into starting the dishwater and Pa had shuffled out to the tiny porch, Ma lingered, clearing the table.

"Going to work tonight, Sidney?"

"No. I'm off tonight. I'm going out."

"Where?"

"Oh—just out. See the gang."

"I wish you wouldn't hang around the drug store with those boys, Sidney boy."

"Aw, Ma!"

"Well, I know—but I wish you wouldn't."

"Well, maybe I'll take in a movie."

"You and Annie?"

"Maybe."

Ma seemed more satisfied. "Annie's a nice girl, Sidney."

"Yeah, she's a nice girl."

"Dear me!"—as with an effort of memory. "You youngsters grow up so fast. Seems 's if it was only last week Mary Bower and me was watchin' you and Annie play in the sand—and now—why, Annie must be older than I was when I married your pa!"

"Is that so?"—uninterestedly. "Well, Ma—" He started to go.

But she still had something to say. She looked at a cup. "Sidney—what's that Mrs. Pynchon *like?*"

"Like? Oh, I dunno, Ma. She's all right to work for."

"She's got a lot of money, hasn't she?"

"Yeah. Say, Ma!"

"It's funny you never see any Mr. Pynchon around."

"Aw, she divorced him."

"Divorced him?"

"Sure. Everybody's divorced in that Sand Point crowd. She's been married three times."

"She must be pretty old, then."

"Oh, she's not so old."

"Well, she acts awful silly and young for anybody that old."

"Aw, no, Ma! You got her wrong." He hesitated. "She—she's one of these Bohemians, Ma."

"I thought she acted foreign." Mrs. Cross's lips drew together.

"Aw, Ma! That ain't what I mean. I mean—" He scuffled his foot. "She's clever—she hangs around with all the people that write books and magazines and things—and she—she tries to help them, when they're just starting out—"

"When they're young?"

"Of course. When they're just starting out. Aw, really, she's a *peach*, Ma!"

"Well, all the same, I wish you could get another kind of a job, Sidney."

"Now, Ma!"

"Well, I do. And as for that Mrs. Pynchon, Sidney—"

"Aw, Ma! So long, Ma."

"Good-by, Sidney boy."

THERE was a frown on Sidney's face as he went upstairs. Ma found such a lot of things to fuss about! Of course he didn't intend to spend the rest of his life running Mrs. Pynchon's launch—but he wasn't going to spend it running a second-rate grocery store like Pa, either! Ma didn't know about the big idea for a new light motorboat engine he had—any more than she realized that his practicing diving whenever he could wasn't just fun. Why, if he got good—really good—and made the Olympic team, maybe—why, maybe he could get some big bug really interested in him and the engine! That was the dope—getting in with the big bugs—then everything was easy. But how were you ever going to get that way when— He thought of canned salmon, disgustedly. Canned salmon! He wasn't going to be tied to canned salmon and all it stood for, all the rest of his life!

He removed a pair of trousers from a pasteboard device that called itself "Little Wonderpress—the Young Bachelor's Best Friend," and examined them critically. Yes. They were pressed. Little Wonderpress had done its duty. But—oh, well, it couldn't be helped.

He dressed with great care—he would have shaved, except that the most hopeful scrutiny detected no real need for such a proceeding. Still, if you shaved with regularity—there must come a time when you really had to shave. It would come. When he had finished, he looked at himself in the mirror. "Groomed," he muttered solemnly. "Yes, kid—you cer'nly are groomed!" And yet a vague cloud of dissatisfaction hovered over him. Was he really as groomed as that?

He tiptoed to the door and locked it. Then, returning, he drew out some magazines from a secret cache and began to compare himself with certain pictures in them, under the weak glare of the single electric bulb.

He would rather have died than let anybody else know he had those pictures. Especially Pearl. But now, in privacy, he examined them with the hot heart of an apprentice before Great Masters—and gradually, as he looked, he felt more satisfied.

They were pictures of men and young men whose faces were as blank as White Dragons in a Mah Jong set, but whose clothes were of an impeccability to freeze the soul. They stood on the steps of Clubs, they strolled Boulevards with Canes, they gracefully reclined at the wheels of Limousines—in sport togs that had never seen a links or a tennis court, they cast chilly glances upon the canaille who watched them.

"The mode of trousers without the turn-up has passed," read Sidney, appreciatively, glancing at his own. He smiled—he had known it would be so. But then he turned to another page: "Correct Formal Dress." His heart sank. What was the use? The being in the magnificent cutaway with the usher's flower in his buttonhole—the being in the shawl-collar dinner jacket with a cigarette held languidly between his fingers—the superb and icy image in entire full-dress with his white tie tied as Brummel could not have tied it—and he, Sidney, didn't even have a tuck. And as for high hats! He had seen one in Beltmeyer's window, and priced it. It had taken him three months to get what he had—with helping Ma. And if he ever did have a chance to get Them—where would he ever wear Them—in this dump? Aw, it wasn't any use—unless a miracle happened. He scowled somberly and replaced the magazines in their cache.

Nevertheless, when he approached Larribee's drug store, some time later, it was with the air he imagined a member of an incredibly Tory Cabinet might employ on entering the Houses of Parliament. At twenty-one dreams are of india-rubber.

A GENTLEMAN of his own age who seemed altruistically occupied in holding up the side of the building, removed a cigarette from his lips and spoke.

"H'lo, sheik!"

"H'lo, stupid! Where's the gang?"

"Dunno. Gone off to the movies tonight, I guess. Hot stuff tonight. 'Wandering Nieces.'"

"Oh, that!" said Lord Sidney, and brushed an imaginary crumb from his coat sleeve.

"Well—sounds like a pretty mean fillum," said his confrère, then, as his glance traveled up and down Lord Sidney's anatomy appreciatively. "Say, sheik, where'd you get the shirt?"

"Oh, that!" said Lord Sidney, coldly. "Just picked it up at Garfinkle's."

"What you mean picked it up? Didn't you pay for it?"

"My good man," said Lord Sidney internally, "naturally." But Sidney merely remarked: "No, stupid, I swapped my grand piano for it—what did you think?"

"Well, anyhow," said his acquaintance, with feeling, "hot mama! It's the tiger's tonsils!"

"Fellow," mused Lord Sidney, "a gentleman always sets what fashions there are." But all his acquaintance heard was, "Say, Spike, I got that running one-and-a-half down cold today."

"You did?"

"Uhuh."

"Hot mama! That's the tiger's tonsils!" said Spike, and fell silent. He had always been a gentleman of limited vocabulary. Sidney moved over to assist him in his task of holding up the drug-store wall.

LORD SIDNEY, the celebrated Olympic diver, was just being presented to the President of France when a familiar voice interrupted Sidney's dreaming.

"Why, Sidney!"

It was Annie and her friend, and Sidney, for once, did not regret his interrupted dream. He liked to look at Annie in spite of what Ma said. You could tell things to Annie. Annie was nice.

The quartet moved into the drug store and sat down at a gummy table. Sodas appeared. The burden of conversation was carried by Sidney and Annie with occasional punctuations of "Hot mama!" from Spike and "You didn't do *that!*" from the friend.

The friend and Spike grew increasingly less important to Sidney—the procession of well-dressed men in trousers creased to the sharpness of safety-razor blades faded from his mind. He was a boy with rumpled hair leaning both elbows on the gummy table to talk better to Annie, and not caring. A project formed in his mind as straws sucked the last syrupy chocolate from wilted paper cups. The first show must just about be letting out at the movies. Why shouldn't he take Annie to the second show?

He had opened his mouth to put the project into words when a party of summer people came into the drug store, making a social noise: men in admirable white flannels and women in dresses that made Annie's dress look bunchy and countrified. They took possession of the place with an air of delicate slummers—and Sidney saw, with horror, that Mrs. Pynchon was alertly their leader. He flushed painfully, staring at the bottom of his paper cup.

Mrs. Pynchon's warm, amused laugh floated out, as she glanced at Annie and her friend and said something to a neighbor. He entertained no thoughts of asking Annie to the second show at the movies—now. The advent of the summer people had crushed Lord Sidney to the earth. All he wanted to do was to get away.

"Well, got to get back home—got things to do," he said incoherently, rising. "So long, Spike—Annie. See you again sometime. Yeah—see you again—" They stared at him a little but let him go. He made a clumsy bob to Mrs. Pynchon as he neared the door, where Lord Sidney would have bowed with such elegance. She stared a little, too, but gave him a kindly gesture. Then he heard Spike's voice behind him, fatally clear: "Hot mama! Lookit our Sidney curtsy to the lady!" He flushed horribly and stumbled as he went out of the door, sure that everybody was laughing.

"SIDNEY!"

"Yes, Mrs. Pynchon?" said Sidney, manipulating the steering-wheel of the launch in which he and his employer were the only passengers. But Mrs. Pynchon, apparently, merely wanted to talk.

"Sidney," she repeated slowly, "Sidney. Curious—the names people have. Were you christened after your father, Sidney?"

"No. Uncle. But he left it all to the hospital," said Sidney briefly, his eyes on the opposite shore.

Mrs. Pynchon smiled. "Too bad," she said. "And yet—you know, Sidney—I'm a great believer in the influence of names. Names," she considered, mellowly. "Yes. Names. They have an influence—oh, an influence— Now my name—Quest—"

"Yeah?" said Sidney, cutting an entirely unnecessary curve in the water. "That's—that's an awful—an awfully nice name, Mrs. Pynchon."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pynchon serenely, "dear boy, yes. It has ruled my life. Questa—the quester—the seeker—the pilgrim of a quest. All my life has been a quest—Sidney."

"It must be fine—uh—to be that way," said Sidney, who felt embarrassed with her eyes.

Mrs. Pynchon leaned forward intensely.

"Fine—yes, it has been fine. But—ah, the bitterness, too! The bitterness, Sidney—"

Her voice left a trail of artificial gold as it died. Sidney glowered at imaginary people who had brought this wonderful person bitterness.

"The bitterness—the misunderstanding—You're young, Sidney—beautifully young; you don't know—but I— How old should you say I was, Sidney?"

"I wouldn't say you were old at *all*, Mrs. Pynchon," said Sidney, scuffling his sneakers.

The answer seemed to please her.

"Dear boy," she breathed again, "you're so kind!"

"Aw—"

"But yes! And so few have the courage to be really kind. The courage to be kind," she repeated, with the air of a sibyl enunciating mysteries, "that's a wonderful thing, and you—but then you're so unspoiled. Ah, yes! You know, Sidney—it's very silly of me—perhaps—but I have come to feel a grave interest in you—so unspoiled. I hope you won't think me preposterous, now I've said so—Sidney!"

Sidney looked at a wave. "You've been awfully kind, Mrs. Pynchon," he brought out at last.

"Kind—no!" She waved it away. "But I so seldom feel interested in people—and now—that I do feel a real interest in you—I want to help you. Can I help you, Sidney?"

After a pause. "Yeah, but—aw—" said Sidney with abrupt intensity. "I wish I—I wish I could do something for *you*."

Mrs. Pynchon gave a satisfied sigh. "You can. You can be my friend, Sidney—my real friend. I have so few real friends." Her voice was very wistful.

"I'd be awful glad to," said Sidney, shyly.

"You shall be. There!" She gave him four fingers to seal it. White fingers.

"You shall be—and—when we are—I mean when there aren't any bothersome people with us—we'll just drop this silly business of—uh—employed and employer—and just be—real friends—shall we?"

"Yes," said Sidney very low.

Her smile was brilliant. "Dear boy! And when those times come—of course not at other times—no—you can call me Questa, Sidney. I like being called—just Questa."

"Oh, Mrs. Pynchon!" said Sidney, overwhelmed.

"No—no—I mean it. And you—" She paused, reflectively. "I think I shall call you Luigi. You have such Italian eyes."

"*What?*" said Sidney, utterly startled.

She tinkled with laughter. She stretched out a graceful hand in a gesture of benefaction. "Would you mind that so very much—Luigi?" she said, and looked at him.

"Aw, Questa—you know I wouldn't!" said Sidney, dazed with the gesture of her hand.

"WELL, brother—what's your pose?" said the languid gentleman dressed as an Egyptian high priest.

Sidney tried to shuffle his sandals on the Chinese rug. But sandals do not shuffle as easily as sneakers.

"I don't get you," he said.

The gentleman seemed to be diverted. "What's *your* pose?" he repeated. "Do you write bum verse or pretend to sculp bum statues or paint invisible scenery—or are you just a free soul after free food like the rest of us that Questa collects at her parties? What *is* he, Questa, darling? Don't tell me he works for a living—he wouldn't be here if he did!"

"Now, Gordie, don't be horrid!" said Questa, rustling up in the silver-veiled robes of Isis. "Luigi *dives*—wonderfully! He's going to show us just how wonderfully he dives just as soon as some one is able to make dear Claire stop giving impersonations of Gilda Gray."

The languid gentleman looked Sidney up and down with the cold eye of a veterinarian inspecting a horse. Then he chuckled.

"Oh, he dives!" he said. "How quaint! You *have* taken to the simple life again, haven't you, Questa dear?"

"*Say!*" said Sidney, and took a step forward. But Questa's hand was on his arm, drawing him away.

Her hand was on his arm and yet—he felt strained and miserable. Everything was being so different from what he'd expected.

He had been so proud of Questa's asking him to come. "Just a little masquerade party of mine, Luigi. Now, Luigi, you're not going to be deadly and conventional, are you? We'll all be in costume—and I have the most *Byzantine* costume for you—"

"Aw, but, Questa!"

"Now, Luigi—" And he had come—even if it did involve Machiavellian plans to insure his changing into costume at a deserted bath-house near Sand Point. And it had been hard, too, keeping it from Ma and the others. Ma couldn't have understood why a lady like Questa would have wanted to invite the—the man who ran her motor-boat—to a swell party of hers, just as if he were really Lord Sidney; any more than Ma could have understood Questa's calling him Luigi, and their being friends. In fact, he considered hopelessly, Ma would never really be a Bohemian, no matter how hard she might ever want to try.

Lord Sidney had at last ascended to his proper environment. He mingled with a gay and social throng in glittering costumes. He drank wine out of aristocratic glasses, he nibbled at delicate sandwiches with an air of superb aplomb. And yet—

In the first place, he hadn't imagined when Questa said she had that Byzantine costume for him that the costume would be —well, so scant. True, he had since seen much scanter costumes than his; but that didn't help the way he felt about it, somehow. Questa could laugh and call him a dear, shy boy—but he felt *queer*. And, in the second place—

The other people must be all right. They were all Questa's friends. But that little Claire woman: she wasn't even funny any more; she was just getting drunk, plain drunk—the way that awful wife of Eddie Wemmick's got. And Questa had only seemed amused at her being that way. And the rest of them—there was something about the rest of them—in their voices, in the movement of their eyes as they looked at each other—that made him feel as if he wanted to take a bath.

He suddenly wished, violently, absurdly, for the clothes he had hidden in that deserted boat-house and the stuffy familiarity of his room behind the grocery store.

BUT Questa's voice was in his ear. "Do you like my party, Luigi?"

He sighed with relief—they had wandered out of the big room where everybody was talking too loud and into a little glassed-in place that was cool with fallen moonlight.

"Yeah. It's a wonderful party!"

"I'm so glad you like it, Luigi."

He looked at her. Her robes shimmered. She was near. Then she was very near. There was shadow on her face, but her eyes looked from the shadow, drawing his eyes.

She laid a hand on his shoulder. "Luigi," she said—and her voice wound cords about him. "Luigi—dear!"

Then, incredibly, he felt her arms go about his neck, and knew that he was kissing her. And when he raised his lips from the lips beneath his, the shadow had gone, and he saw her face again, terribly distinct in the moon.

She was a haggard, painted old thing with cords in her throat, and her arms about his neck were the arms of a witch.

"Oh, God!" said Sidney, hopelessly.

Just then the languid gentleman poked his head through the curtains. "So early in the evening, Questa?" he said with smiling mockery.

The arms fell from about Sidney's neck and Sidney, as in a nightmare, saw Questa's face change and grow narrow with hate.

"Get out of here, you silly fool!" she spat, appallingly, and the face of the languid gentleman disappeared. Questa laid horribly possessive fingers on Sidney's wrist.

"Ah, dear—if we could only stay here!" she said with dreadful tenderness. "But we'll come back—won't we, dear?"

"Sorry to interrupt," said the voice of the languid gentleman, through the curtains, "but everybody's yipping for Luigi to come out and do his dive."

SIDNEY never knew quite how he managed to get up on the rail of the little balcony over the water. They had wanted him to change into a bathing-suit—but Questa had said it would spoil everything if he didn't do it in costume—he remembered that. He could see her now, in the forefront of the weaving crowd of masqueraders—her eyes fixed on him—that awful possessiveness still in them.

"All right, Luigi?" she called.

The—the awful old woman!

"All right," said Sidney, shuddering, and dived.

It was a beautiful twenty-footer and when he came up and trod water he could hear them applauding. He saw Questa leaning over the balcony, her hands cupped to her mouth.

"Oh, Luigi—how wonderful! Come up by the little door on the right, Luigi—there by the steps! We're going to crown you with laurel as soon as you come!"

He smiled grimly and settled himself to swim. At first they didn't notice where he was swimming. Then they did—and then there were shouts. He even heard Questa's voice: "Luigi! Where are you going?" But he paid no attention to that or anything else. For a moment he thought regretfully of his clothes in the deserted boat-house. But he had not the slightest intention of going back for them. Home was more than a mile away across the strait—but he felt very much like swimming this evening, thank you—and he intended to swim there or drown on the way.

When he finally hauled out on the sand beneath the old bathing pavilion that only the townspeople used, he could have hugged it. Instead he lay on his back, and rested, and looked at the sky, and thought of many things.

After a while he was conscious that some one else was lying on the sand near by. He peered through the black-and-silver shadows.

"Hi— Oh, hello, Annie! What you doin' out this late?"

"Hello, Sidney. Oh, I dunno. Lot of moonlight tonight. Milly and I and Pa came out for a swim. They're up dressing."

"Well," said Sidney, comfortably, and moved closer to the dark hummock that Annie made.

"Where did you come from, Sidney?"

"Oh, I've been swimming around. Lot of moonlight tonight," said Sidney, easily.

His hand, groping in the shadows, found another hand and closed over it gently.

"Why, Sidney!" But the hand remained in his hand.

He began to talk hurriedly. "Annie—when I get a job, Annie—"

"But, Sidney—you got a job—with Mrs. Pynchon."

He laughed scornfully. "Nope! I'm—I'm through with Mrs. Pynchon, Annie." "Huh!" said Lord Sidney. "Do you think I'm going to spend the rest of my life running an old—an old paint-pot—around in a second-hand launch?" "I'm going to get a real job, Annie, somewhere I'll really learn about motors and things—and when I do—"

"But I thought you were going to be an Olympic div—"

"Oh, I'll do that on the side." The blood of the Sidneys mantled in Lord Sidney's cheeks. "But I—I guess I don't know as much about things as I thought I did, Annie; and so I'm going to get a real job—so I can really get going with that motor of mine. And, Annie—I guess things take longer to come when you really have to work for them—but I'll get there, Annie. And, Annie—if you'd sort of be willing to wait till I do—"

There was no answer in words, but the pressure of the hand in his answered.

"Oh, Annie! You—" said Sidney.

But Annie had heard a hail from the bathing pavilion and jumped up.

"You aren't goin', Annie?"

She smiled at him in a way that Ma would have recognized.

"But listen, Annie!"

She hesitated. "But tomorrow, Sidney—"

"Yeah?"

"Well, Sidney—if you want to come to supper tomorrow—it'll only be canned salmon, you know—Ma never seems to think of anything else these days—"

"Aw, Annie! You know I'm *crazy* about canned salmon!" said Sidney, with heartfelt conviction.

Coming in April

Besides the complete novel, "The Caraways," by George Looms (see announcement on page 98), there will be—

Seven Short Stories

Society Stuff By Gayne Dexter

It's a long jump from the White Way to the parlors of the Four Hundred—even for the dauntless Milton Glaze

The Gun-Woman By Sonya Levien

Being the daughter of a wealthy head-waiter and the wife of a man-about-town is not easy

The Story in the Bottle By Roderick W. Siler

A tactful woman acts as umpire between mutineering coolies and a handful of hard-driven officers

The Critic on the Hearth By Ernest Poole

There's nothing like a sarcastic sister-in-law to keep things lively in any home

The Law of Nature By R. K. Jorgensen

Something more urgent than self-preservation drives a crippled dog across miles of howling wilderness

The Parrot By Elizabeth Bowen

A venturesome parrot leads a young lady over the stone wall of convention

His Birthday By Maryse Rutledge

A tingling discovery transforms a slowly dying man's profound disappointment with life into a certain elation

And further instalments of two serials: "The Great Samara," by E. Phillips Oppenheim, and "The Phantom Caravan," by Howard Vincent O'Brien

April *EVERYBODY'S* Out March 14

MAYES

" 'Elpless Lot o' Blokes, Sailors!" Declared the Ex-Corporal. "Without No Orficer to Drag 'Em Around by the Snoot, They're Lorst"

By Captain Dingle

Illustration by Courtney Allen

MAYES had made one half-voyage between Australia and India since retiring from the army; so he counted himself no longer a soldier but a sailor. There had been few better soldiers. Undoubtedly there were few worse sailors. But he had time to learn.

"Give a bloke a charnce, carn't yer?" he used to retort with dignity which was hard on the point of explosion, when officer or man cursed him for some mistake. "You wasn't none o' yer 'and-picked orf a bloomin' tree ready-made, was yer?" His voice always kept the civil tone of long army service; but his walruslike mustache would bristle and his gray eyes snap when he made the retort.

For all his greenness, shipmates liked him, for he was full of racy anecdote and army humor; and in the horse-carrying trade between Newcastle and Calcutta a little humor went a long way. The *Hotspur* was an old ship, and apt to be cranky in a blow; her pumps were used quite often, and she was no match for the newer clippers in speed or weatherlines; but her holds were spacious, her decks wide, and in the important matter of taking heavy seas aboard she was a dry ship.

It was rather in the trifles of rats, roaches, and bugs that her men found cause for growling. And there Ted Mayes shone, for his life in barracks and camp had made him blood brother to all three. But his methods left his shipmates doubtful about his merits so far as they were concerned. He sliced a lemon, stolen from the steward, and tacked the little circles to his bunk boards. The bugs were driven from his bunk, but not very far; his mates refused to let him try his hand on the roaches and rats after that.

"You blokes 'aven't no bowels," he told them. "Do the same as me. They'll keep movin'. Keep after 'em and they'll drop dead from want of sleep. You oughter been 'long o' our lot out in Rawalpindi. Talk about rats!"

Then Mayes would hold them silent for an hour with tales of fights and fun, plagues and pleasures, for he had the gift of tongue.

Only when the old *Hotspur* ran into weather and began to wallow did Mayes lose his cheery optimism. Not that he lost his tongue, or his willingness to talk; but his reminiscences took on another, more somber tone. Horses were dying, squealing with the agony of broken legs, one fierce day outside Sandheads, when the Hugli pilot dared not board the ship, and Mayes was doing three men's work in the hold, bringing all his cavalry lore into play, as far as the giddy motion of the ship would let him.

"I knew a officer once," he bawled above the din, hauling on a tackle to clear a kicking horse. "Doctor, he was. I was 'is batman." A steep sea rolled the ship down, and his kicking horse slid clear suddenly, hurling Mayes headlong to leeward among a heap of cripples. His remarks took on another color for a moment; then he carried on his work and his yarn together. " 'E wasn't no good, 'e wasn't. One o' them smart coves. 'Andy with 'is 'ands, give 'im that. Won the officers' middleweights, 'e did. But 'e'd poke a bloke in the mug for lookin' sideways at 'im, just to show 'e could do it. Boozed, too. 'E 'it me once, and I done a bit in clink for it."

"Wot did you go into clink for, Ted?" demanded his tackle mate. "Not for 'im socking you?"

The ship heeled steeply, the seas hammered outside, and a rare lump of water shot through the hatchway, frightening still more already panicky horses. It was two hours before the harassed mates and cursing men got the holds clear of dead horses and secured the whole ones; by that time Mayes's yarn was almost forgotten. But when the pilot was aboard, and the ship sailing serenely up-river, he was reminded of the officer who 'it 'im in the mug and made him do a bit in clink for it.

"You blokes 'aven't got no sense," he grumbled, sucking contentedly at his pipe. "It ain't no man's place to talk about 'is officers like that. Shut yer 'oles and be glad yer got officers to lead yer by the snout. I never see such 'elpless blokes as sailors, s'welp me if I did."

THAT voyage the *Hotspur* landed only half her horses in Calcutta, the rest being ordered on to Rangoon. Others were to be added: horses that had been acclimatized in Bengal before being sold to Burma. Some of the newcomers had been raced; grooms came with these, and common horse-tenders to take care of the sea-weary Walers remaining of the Australian contingent. Before the new horses were shipped, the survivors were given exercise ashore, and Mayes proudly led the parade, willingly conceded precedence by his shipmates as a horseman.

"You're a blooming fine ostler, Mayes," they told him. " 'Op to it." And Mayes, too proud to notice the subtle jeer, led his line of horses like a crack cavalry captain.

Once more outside the river, breasting the swell of the Bay of Bengal, Mayes helped to finish the main hold gangway, an invention of the skipper's, which was to permit horses to walk on deck from below for daily exercise.

"Exercise is all right, but these 'osses 'll need 'ats in this 'eat," said Mayes, gloomily.

He was only one in the crowd, one of the least, performing laborious duties as a part of his sailor's routine. He could shine among horses. As a sailor he was not so scintillant. They let him carry boards, and hammer spikes, and sweat, while other, better sailors made sail and coiled up gear. Even the landlubberly horsemen enjoyed easier times just then, for their charges had been exercised for that day, and the evening feeding-time and bedding down was not yet due.

Mayes took off his battered old army topi and forefingered the sweat from his dripping forehead. He scowled toward the gang of horsemen, making some sort of rough sport under the forecastle head. He liked a bit of sport himself. There had been a day when no company or regimental boxing tournament was complete until Ted Mayes put his name down. He fought a great many novices' bouts, never winning but always plastering the winner so thoroughly that winning was as bad as losing, before he astonished the regiment one evening by wading through three heats to a hectic final and winning the welter-weights with four straight one-round knock-outs.

He never won after that, though; and with characteristic modesty he disclaimed all credit for improvement, simply stating the opinion that it must have been the new cask of canteen beer the sergeant opened that day. Certainly Ted was above himself when entering the ring. Whatever truth there may have been in the theory, his officers gave him a purse of shining cash (which he promptly devoted to buying up the rest of the cask for his comrades), and dubbed him Amazing Mayes, which name stuck to him as long as he was in the army. He had not heard it for a long time now.

But he was glowering at the crowd under the forecastle head. He loved sport, but sport in his simple code never had included torture or bullying or even questionable tricks in the way of practical jokes; and things seemed a bit queer forward, there. The horsemen yelled boisterously, ganging and surging about some cowering figure in their midst. He left his hammer and sawed board ends on the hatch and walked forward to see.

"Mayes!" shouted the officer of the watch. "Come back here and clean up after you! What sort of sailor are you?"

Mayes halted, but immediately turned forward again, walking more quickly, for the invisible victim of the horseplay suddenly burst through the circle of his tormentors, bleeding and blindly groping, straightened up surprisingly, and knocked down three horsemen in as many seconds with the prettiest left-right-lefts ever seen. The moment the blows were struck, the fellow who struck them tottered, laughed harshly, and fell in a crumpled heap beside the men he had knocked out.

"Once before I seen that punch!" Mayes almost shouted as he reached and stared down at the last man to fall.

"Mayes! Lay aft here!" bawled the officer of the watch angrily.

"Go to 'ell!" growled Mayes, and flopped to his knees on the deck.

The fallen man smelled of native liquor. He was dirty, unkempt, and only half shod. But his parted lips, grinning curiously, revealed even teeth kept scrupulously clean. The partly clenched hands, palms up on the deck, were foul with grime, but soft, and trim as to nails and cuticle. One by one the three victims of his soft hands stumbled up from their recumbent positions, listened bewilderedly to the vengeful promptings of their fellows, and crowded around Mayes, thrusting him aside with threatening gestures toward their recent victim.

"Don't shove me!" snarled Mayes. They hauled at him. He glared up at them. "Give yer my word, I'll dot yer one apiece if you—"

"Here, what's this? What's up?" demanded the second mate, bursting upon the group with blood in his eye for Mayes. "Hey, you, Mayes! Didn't I call you aft? I'll work you up, by gravy! Get aft and—"

"It's my old orficer, sir, Surgeon-Major Polk," said Mayes, paying no heed to the officer's belligerent aspect, but gently raising the head of the senseless derelict clear of the teakwood deck.

"Who?" barked the officer, frowning.

"It's one o' them noo roustabouts, sir, and he ain't wuth powder to blow him—" the boss horseman started.

Mayes's walrus mustache began to bristle. The second mate became suddenly conscious of a momentarily forgotten dignity, and sharply bade the men disperse.

"You," he said to Mayes, "drag that chap over to the waterways and wash him off. If he's a friend of yours, I'd advise you to make him quit fighting. He's a hot-looking specimen."

"I tell yer 'e's Surgeon-Major—" began Mayes, belligerently.

"Was, maybe!" cut in the second mate tersely.

Mayes looked at the seamed and haggard face in his hands, and his seasoned old nose wrinkled at the sour reek of foulness arising from the parted, grinning lips.

"Yessir!" he said, more humbly, and, struggling to his feet, dragged the derelict across the deck and laid him in the scuppers while he obtained a draw bucket.

DOG watches were not as amusing as they had been, for Mayes had developed an unaccountable aversion to companionship. He spent all of his leisure time with the ragged roustabout, who called himself Smith and treated Mayes with astounding incivility. While the *Hotspur* swam lazily through the vari-colored seas, steaming with windless heat, reeking with stable smells, the dog-watch singsongs and yarn-spinnings ought to have provided brief surcease to the discomforts of sailors and horsetenders. But none could sing a rousing song like Mayes. No man ever surpassed his wonderful knack of telling a good tale. And now, just when stodgy weather and blazing heat made every day a penance, and every dog-watch a breath of life, Ted Mayes held aloof from his mates and spent hour after hour sitting beside a scarecrow called Smith, who shirked his work, cursed his companion with astonishing point and brevity, and seemed to have discovered an inexhaustible store of befuddling mediums.

On a sultry evening when the sun stared unwinkingly like an eye of yellow glass out of a sky that seemed to be turning green in death, when the ship barely moved through a jasper sea teeming with millions of transparent jellyfish and what small air there was breathed hot and sickly, Smith staggered up from the fodder storage space, drunk. A few hopeful souls lounged around a youngster with an accordion, in the inadequate shade of the sluggishly flapping foresail, making sporadic efforts to strike up a harmony. The steward had issued some oatmeal to mix in their water rations, as a preventive against colic and prickly heat, and a bucketful of the warm, milky fluid stood beside them with a hookpot floating in it. There is always one man in every forecastle who is ready, and more than willing, to assume superintendence over any extra ration issued, and Toby Scroggs lorded it over the oatmeal water.

"Come on, fellers, start a toon," urged the accordion player.

He squeezed some sour noises from the instrument, which were supposedly inducive to song; but Toby Scroggs was staring wolfishly at the lurching figure of Smith, swaying over the shoulders of Mayes as he sat on the bitts. Toby Scroggs would take charge of oatmeal water if there was nothing else; but it was none of his choosing, and here was a man, a ragged, poor creature miscalled a man, who had undoubtedly been drinking something far, far more colorful than oatmeal water, and more potent, more conducive to harmony.

"Gow an' leave me if yer wishit,
Never let me crorss yewr mind;
If yew think I ain't worf 'avin',
Gow an' leave me, never mind."

A scarred and gap-mouthed sailor opened his soul in song, shutting both eyes in the ecstasy of the sentiments he yawped forth. He got through a whole verse while Toby was reaching for the hookpot. Then a pint of oatmeal water was slapped into his face, and Toby cursed him:

"Swaller that, you mouthy cowson! Who asked you to stick yer oar in?"

The singer stumbled to his feet, promising Toby horrible things; but Toby was already off the hatch and halfway to the side of the fascinating Smith. Mayes was on his feet, too, speaking fiercely.

"Give it to me, sir! I warn yer I'll take it orf yer!"

Smith cursed and sneered, slapping Mayes on the cheek with his open hand. Toby reached them, with most of the crew at his heels, as Mayes, livid and blazing of eye, grappled with Smith, never striking him, but wrestling with him until he reached around the ragged jacket and dragged to light a bottle. Smith closed his fist now, struck Mayes a vicious punch which cut his eyebrow to the bone. Mayes let that pass, too, breaking away with the bottle upraised for a throw. He hurled it clear of the side of the ship, while Smith swore with educated virulence, and the next moment Mayes was overwhelmed by the furious onslaught of the maddened Toby and his liquor-cheated mates.

MAYES fought; and until a man hit him over the head with the water bucket his walrus mustache bristled defiantly. But he went down at last; and the first thing he coherently realized, on coming to, was that somewhere not far away a group of sailors and horsemen, who had not been so friendly before, took turns drinking from a bottle passed around by Smith, whom all had hitherto treated like a pariah. Then Smith's voice came to his ears, cold and sarcastic.

"Amazing Mayes, they called him in the army! Should have been Amazed, not Amazing."

"Was you in the army, Smith?" prompted Toby Scroggs, reaching for another turn at the bottle. "Orf'cer?"

"Mind your own damned business!" snapped Smith savagely, and snatched the bottle away and staggered forward with it.

"I'll kick seven bells outa him!" swore Toby, watching him go.

Mayes held himself aloof from Smith after that experience. He found himself shunned, too, even by shipmates who had liked him, for in hurling that bottle of rum overboard he had committed a grievous offense against all forecastle friendship. He minded but little the avoidance of the horsemen. He never counted them his equals: he, who was a sailor. But it hurt him more than he showed when watchmates who had reviled him good-temperedly for his green seamanship gave him black looks and cursed him unsmilingly.

Days were hot, and nights were stifling, for there was little wind. The suffering horses kicked at the plank floor of the hold until the ship resounded like a vast drum. Their whickering and dry snorting kept the steamy air vibrant with pain. In those days there was no ship's work other than cleaning and washing down the hot decks. The seamen helped the horsemen to exercise the horses, for many of the landsmen, poor stuff at the best, welcomed the chance to shirk in the terrific heat.

Mayes took on his added duties with gladness, for idleness along with the hostility of his fellows was souring him. He led up the first horse of a batch for exercise, and forgot his grievances in the gentling of the nervous animal. The ship rolled as only a wind-bereft windjammer can roll; the horses slipped and stumbled. Down in the very bowels of the ship Smith labored agonizingly with a pitchfork tossing stable litter up to a midway platform where two other horse-tenders caught it and pitched it again through the hatchway to be thrown overboard. Of all the men exercising horses, Mayes alone had sea legs steady enough to make the job other than a torment to man and beast. He lacked much of being a complete sailorman; but he had the will and the bowels to learn, and many trips in troop ships had given him sea-kindly legs. He could hum a song as he led his horse up and down the reeling deck:

> Wrop me hup in me tarpaulin jacket,
> And say a pore sailor lies low, lies low.

He was passing the main hatch as he started his song. It was an old army favorite, which he had, with crude invention, changed into a sea song.

"Sing it right or shut up, you damned defaulter!" screamed Smith from the heap of litter below.

The song stopped. Perspiring, cursing horsemen on the midway platform flung back forkfuls of litter upon Smith, and terrified him into abject silence with the fear of a noisome avalanche. Mayes led his horse around the deck, followed by a string of staggering brutes in the hands of sick, miserable men.

WHEN the horses were safely secured below decks again, the mate gave Mayes a job. There were signs of wind in the coppery west, and the horsemen seemed to be incapable of taking care of their work.

"Make up that coil of line into headstalls," said the mate. "Know what a headstall is, don't you?"

"I ought to!" growled Mayes, not sure whether to feel flattered at having the job or peeved at the question.

"Ought to!" the mate repeated, contemptuously. "Ought to don't always mean can do. Look at your chum, Smith. He ought to—"

" 'Ow many shall I make, sir?" Mayes cut in gruffly.

"Make up the coil. And don't make 'em too long. We may have to hitch up the horses head and tail to a midship bullrope if it blows much."

Mayes worked stolidly at his rope. Some seamen were overhauling footrope seizings on the yards above his head, and for once he did not feel resentful at being given work not included in the term "seamanship." He was full of somber thoughts. Forward he could hear the harsh, almost bestial vituperation of Smith aimed at his tormentors. Since that day when he had snatched the bottle of rum from Smith, only to be set upon by furious shipmates, and to find on awakening that Smith had replenished his liquor from some mysterious source, Mayes had kept strictly to himself, so far as Smith was concerned. That meant that he had to keep to himself entirely, for the seamen glowered at him for robbing them of a good swig of rum, and he was too proud to seek the society of a lot of seagoing stable hands. But his flesh crawled at times when Smith was cursing his tormentors most virulently. Whoever the derelict got his liquor from, he got plenty of it, and with a queer turn of cunning kept it to himself. Never again did he offer to share it; and Toby Scroggs saw to it that his shipmates found in that just cause and reason for a systematic campaign of bullying which had all but driven Smith crazy, what with liquor, sun, and shame.

"That chap Smith, now, if he's a friend o' yours—" the mate began again, coming up beside Mayes after half an hour's absence.

" 'E's no friend o' mine, sir," growled Mayes, tucking the end seizing of a headstall eye.

"Well, if he ever was, you'd better find out where he's getting all the rum from and destroy it before he gets chased overboard by the red devils."

The mate was a friendly soul, with a heart too big for his job. He had a mustache like Ted Mayes's. In youth he had had ambitions to enter the army and work up to a commission. In his mind an army officer was the most glorious creature on earth. The feeling had modified a little in the years, but, while he never permitted it to interfere with his sailorly abilities, it still lingered; and that was one reason why he was ever indulgent toward Mayes in his greenhorn days. And ever since Mayes had dropped that first hint as to the real identity of Smith, the mate could scarcely restrain himself from starting on the subject whenever the old soldier was within hail.

"He must have gallons of it hidden somewhere," the mate went on.

"If 'e 'as, nobody 'll ever find it," returned Mayes, spreading his strands for another eye.

"Is it true that he's a broken-down officer?" coaxed the mate.

"'Oo, Smith?" countered Mayes with superb stupidity, picking up his fid.

The men were sliding down from aloft. One of them came down a fore-and-aft stay and dropped on to the hatch right beside Mayes as the mate put the query.

"Smith's the bloke wot put a shiner on Mayes when he was in the army, sir," said the grinning sailor, in the easy-going fashion of an easy ship in the East. "Major, or somethink, he was. Mayes dotted him one back, for luck, and done clink for it."

"I'll dot you one for luck, m' son!" shouted Mayes, and dropped fid, rope and marline to make good the promise.

The mate dragged him back. "Carry on with your work!" he ordered angrily.

Mayes sat down, cursing under his big mustache; the sailor trotted forward, grinning.

"Tell me about it, Mayes," prompted the mate. He took up the rope, and began to measure it off in lengths, his back half turned toward Mayes. "If it's true, it's a damned shame to see him going down the hill like he's doing. I'll speak to the Old Man about him."

"You needn't," retorted Mayes. "'E don't want no 'elp. A rotter 'e was, and a rotter 'e'll always be. It's in 'im."

"But you started out to take his part. Must be something in him. What was his trouble?"

"Same it is now. Boozin', bullyin' and—"

"What?"

"Don't arsk me! Find out where 'e gits 'is lushin's from, and you'll know," snapped Mayes, and bent over his work.

The mate tried to force further replies, but Mayes shut up like a barnacle.

"But anyhow, you say Smith is the same man who was your—" the mate urged after many failures to draw a response.

"I was 'is batman for five years. 'E was surgeon of our lot up at Rawalpindi, and I don't know nothink else about 'im, sir. 'E's Smith to me," stated Mayes rapidly after a stubborn effort to keep his mouth shut; and no word more would he say.

But he had said enough. The mate spoke to the captain about the matter, and the captain sent for Smith to see him in the cabin. Mayes heard the order, watched Smith shamble tremblingly aft, his nerves all ajangle, eyes bloodshot, teeth tightly clenched behind parted lips. And, his work done, he smoked his pipe on the head-pump, waiting to catch some inkling of the result.

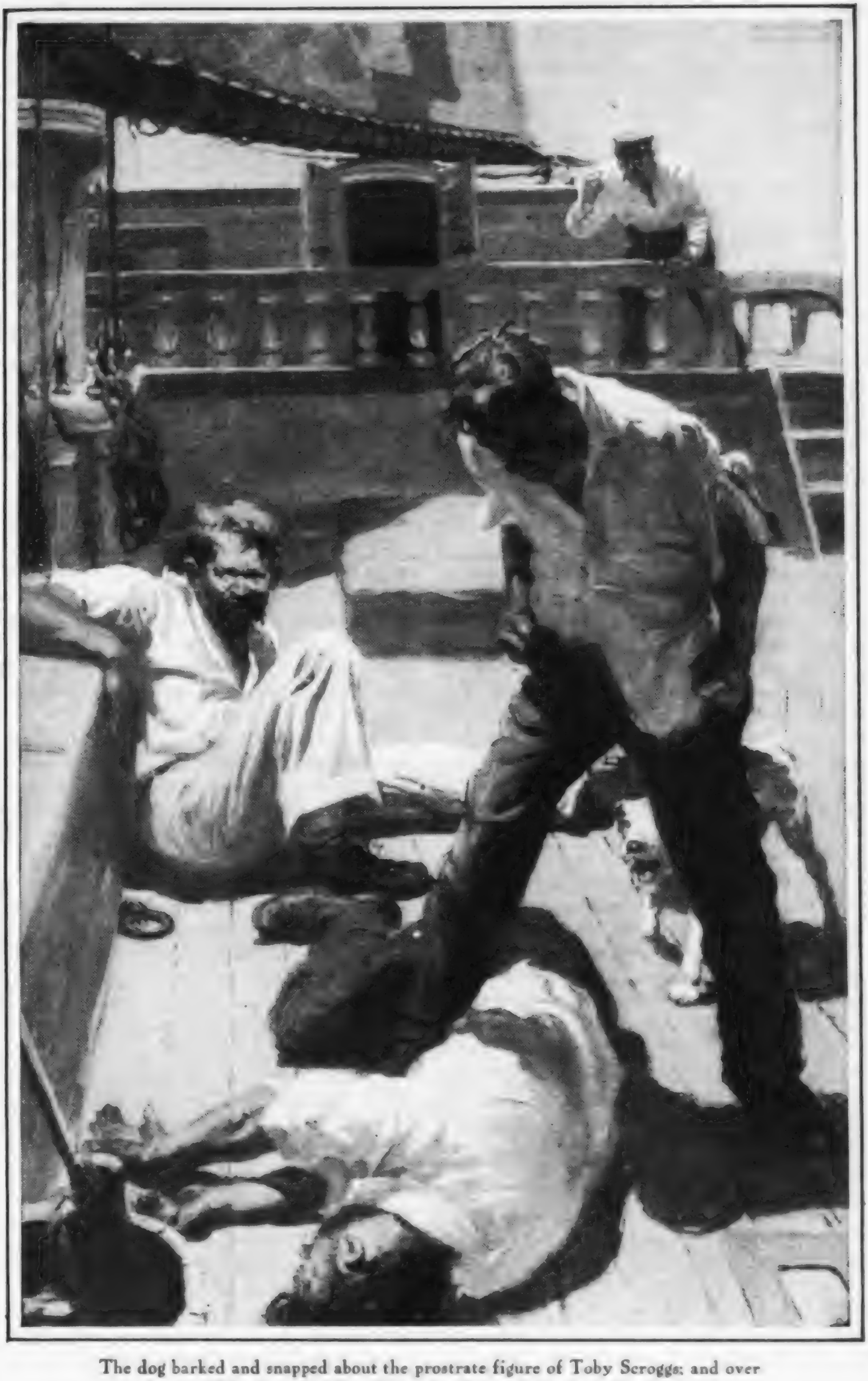
IN A very short time Smith shambled forward again, spitting bitter oaths, grinning insanely, while on the poop stood an awed mate, a half-amused second mate, and a wide-eyed, open-mouthed, almost apoplectic skipper who stared after Smith with nervously working fingers which looked as if they really ought to be shaking the life out of the derelict. And to Mayes's listening ears came the skipper's sudden announcement at which both mates snapped into respectful attention:

"Insolent guttersnipe! Mind my own business? Smith he is, and who the hell am I to meddle with his choice of life! By Noah, sir, I'll show him! Mister mate!" The mate stepped hastily into view. "Put the brute in irons!"

Mayes started to his feet, alarmed. Smith, if he heard the hot words that followed him from the sacred poop, gave no heed but shambled cursing on his way. The mate spoke to the angry skipper in a tone too low to carry beyond the poop rail; but the skipper's rejoinder was not in the least subdued:

"Can't put him in irons for that? By Noah, sir, I'll put Gawd 'Lmighty in irons if he tells me to my face on my own poop to keep my sympathy for my old woman's sewing circle! And tell that other old soldier to watch himself! A precious pair, by Noah!"

Smith was not put in irons. The mate was wise enough to wait until the skipper's wrath cooled, and then saner counsels prevailed. But the interview had stirred some vitriolic spring within Smith, and his behavior that evening brought down upon



The dog barked and snapped about the prostrate figure of Toby Scroggs; and over Toby crouched Smith, livid and chattering with fury.

him a savage beating from some of his fellow horsemen who could not stomach the things he said to them. Mayes started to interfere, for the man was beaten up cruelly; but no amount of beating could stay that biting tongue, no help could drive a spark of appreciation through Smith's drink-clouded brain.

"Let 'im 'elp hisself!" Mayes muttered, and withdrew with his pipe out of the way. He smoked fiercely, pulling the long ears of a mangy, battle-scarred pup that had attached itself to the horses in Calcutta and had refused to be kicked ashore. Where the poor beast got food enough, nobody knew or cared. It slept down among the horses, and paid its lodging by keeping the rats away from the horses' mangers.

"Let 'im 'elp hisself, same as you do, puppy," Mayes repeated; and the mongrel shivered in ecstasy at the first kindly word spoken to it since sneaking on board.

In spite of his ideas as expressed to the doggy waif, Ted Mayes borrowed the second mate's flashlight that evening, to search for a mythical water-tank key which he said he had dropped down in the chain locker; and with it, when his watchmates were sleeping uneasily in the stifling forecastle, he stole below through the horse hatch and made his silent way forward to the forage store.

THE windless heat and the heaving swell made the hold a seething, groaning hell, to which the snortings and whinnyings of the tortured horses added the last demoniacal note of realism. The barometer had been falling slowly all day, the sunset was coppery and portentous, but no wind had come out of the blazing heavens; rather had a murky haze curtained the sun before it was fairly below the sea. Every roll and dip of the ship brought forth disquieting voices from her old frames and spars. The dull thump of the horses' hoofs as they kicked in their unrest, the squeaking of myriad rats fighting over the fodder litter, unbothered, strangely, by the doggy derelict, filled the vast hull with shivery sound. Mayes crawled along, in the darkness, keeping his light shut off, swearing at himself for a fool. He passed the rough bunks of the horsemen. He brushed against a naked arm that was wet and clammy. A dreamer shrieked; a horse squealed; Mayes stopped. Then a dog whimpered, subduedly, as if half buried. Cautiously Mayes flashed his light toward that sound, for he had wondered why the rats held such high revel. The thread of light was reflected in one big brown happy doggy eye; the whimper died; a dull thudding might have been a frenziedly happy tail thumping on boards.

"I be damned!" gasped Mayes.

The light had swiftly revealed to him a picture that changed many of his ideas. The despised mongrel had deserted his post as sentry over the feed; he was lying, crumpled up, overlain, but blissfully content in the arm and partly under the body of Smith, whose fingers were twisted about one of the long, loppy ears. Smith slept, breathing stertorously, limbs twitching, and lips awry; but there was something in the wry lines about his mouth which hinted that his dreams might not be wholly evil. Mayes shut off his light, and continued on his way toward the sound of the fighting rats, muttering to himself about damn fool dogs, but all the while feeling that the dog might not be such a fool.

At the great pile of hay trusses he kicked heavily with his boots to disperse the rats. Not before he turned on his light did they run. Then he was at a loss, for nowhere could he see any trace of an opening in the pile of trusses, nor yet of a suspicious cache which might conceal liquor. But he knew that Smith was getting some sort of hard intoxicant somewhere, and would not believe that he had brought such a store aboard with him as would last so long.

There was no hidden store near the fodder pile, though the reek of alcohol was sickening. Mayes rummaged industriously until he traced the smell to the forepeak bulkhead. Then he discovered a cunningly made blind: a board, covered with hay stuck on with tar. Behind this he found a broken plank in the bulkhead, which in turn let him through into the boatswain's lower locker, where turpentine, paint, oil, new rope and tar were kept. Following up the intoxicating reek, he speedily discovered Smith's source of inspiration in the shape of a small drum of alcohol, carried in the ship for the mixing of a special bottom composition.

"I be damned!" swore Mayes, rolling

the drum. It was half empty. Taking out the bung with his knife, he held the hole downward until the drum was drained. Then, his mustache bristling, and breathing noisily, he returned the way he had come, carefully replacing the hay-covered board, and pausing for a moment longer than necessary in passing to look again upon the sleeping Smith. The dog opened one brown eye, sleepily, thumped his tail on the deck two or three times, and snuggled to sleep again with his strange bedfellow.

THE calm persisted. The barometer rose after the fall without any of the weather it indicated coming near the *Hotspur*. The horses suffered intensely; the water supply began to worry the captain. The sky had a smoky haze, the sea was greasy and dead. The galley refuse floated in sight all day; there were no birds with energy enough to investigate it. If there were fish in the sea they chose the cooler depths.

Day by day, hour by hour, and all night long the bleached and baked rigging and sails twanged and flapped as the ship rolled sickly on the breathless swell. Woodwork was blistering to the touch; iron simply peeled the skin off wherever it touched. If a man stood still in one spot for two minutes his feet stuck to the pitch in the seams. The boss horseman was a walking curse, for his nondescript crew could not be driven to their work. The few grooms who attended the horses that had raced, made some sort of effort to carry on, but the rest sat down on their jobs like Eastern fatalists. Only Smith went with apparent willingness to his work, followed now at every step by the lop-eared mongrel. Mayes watched him anxiously, wondering that he did not seem more concerned about his alcohol store. But there was little time for conjecture, for the skipper started without delay to punish Smith for his insolence of the day before. Every imaginable job that was meaner or dirtier than usual was flung at Smith. He did it, grinning, swearing, followed by the dog. By afternoon he was stumbling, still grinning, and had cursed the dog twice.

" 'E's got some bottled away!" muttered Mayes, and prepared to seek that store when work was done.

But before night another concern occupied the ship's company. At eight bells of the afternoon watch, a man pitched forward on the deck and lay there sprawling.

"Sunstroke!" decided the mate.

"Calenture!" amended the skipper.

Smith, pitching litter over the side, staggering at every step, glanced down at the man, and laughed harshly.

"Fever!" he cackled, and proceeded with his sickening job.

In the first dog-watch the boss horseman reported to the captain five horses dead.

"One of them's that racin' stallion, too. That'll melt your profits, captain."

"Why don't you make your gang work?" cried the harassed skipper.

"Why don't you make yer bloody old ship move?" retorted the boss.

"I can't without wind, can I?"

"My gang ain't salamanders, neither! Better make your sailors exercise the hosses. They ain't doing anything else."

"I'll give you men in the morning," said the skipper. "Bring the horses up before the sun gets up. Mister Mate! Have the watch hoist out those dead horses and dump 'em."

BEFORE midnight half the watch were down with fever. By dawn there were only two horse-tenders unprostrated. When the horses were brought up for exercise, they needed every available man, sailor or horseman, to care for them; and the second mate left the idle wheel untended to take the halter of the last horse whose tender fell from the gangway through weakness while leading the animal up.

A horse broke a leg while stumbling on the reeling deck. The boss horseman shot it and the sailors swung it over the side. The carcass floated, bumping along the ship's side; and men who could stand to see turned away fearfully at sight of a dozen sharp black fins ripping through the glassy sea toward the feast.

"Ought to make that fellow Smith take care of the sick men, sir," grumbled the mate, mopping his brow after seeing the horses safely below.

"If you believe that silly yarn about his being an army doctor—" the skipper retorted, incompletely, and hurried below to dose himself with quinine. He had shivered violently, though the sun was well up; and he did not think the sight of those sharks was the reason.

Mayes sought out Smith after breakfast. Nobody seemed hungry. Twelve men lay moaning in their fetid bunks. Cockroaches and rats fought over the food lying in the mess-kids on the dirty deck.

"You oughter orfer to look after the sick men," said Mayes, coming upon Smith under the forecastle head.

Smith grinned, not pleasantly, and concealed something. The dog had deserted him temporarily, having discovered a complete breakfast for two men lying uneaten in the boatswain and carpenter's room, where two men sang in their beds in rising delirium.

"Wot's 'e want, matey?" barked Toby Scroggs, crawling in beside Smith and regarding Mayes belligerently.

Smith grinned still less pleasantly. The ship pitched her bows deep into a glassy hillock of water, and a trickle of water ran down from the hawsepipe plugs and wet the three men sitting or kneeling there. Mayes ignored Toby, and put his suggestion again. Toby grunted.

"Let 'em go to 'ell," he said relievedly. " 'Ow about a snifter, old socks?"

Mayes shivered, and rubbed his eyes. It was shadowy under the forecastle head; his eyes seemed misty; but that was to be expected, for sweat ran into his eyes continually. Smith glanced at him, queerly, then brought into sight a bottle half full of colorless liquor. Toby pounced upon it, and pulled the cork. The reek of the raw spirit was nose-tingling, even above the ship smells of hot pitch, sticky tar, and horses. Mayes rose to his feet, unsteadily, and snatched the bottle away.

"You don't get none!" snarled Toby, and rushed upon Mayes's turned back.

Mayes went stolidly to the foredeck rail, punched by Toby but apparently oblivious of the blows, and flung the bottle into the sea. Then he turned and knocked Toby Scroggs down. He staggered a bit but braced himself for the return attack, while Smith, on hands and knees, glared out from under the forecastle head, grinning evilly. Toby came back, and there was a short, fierce encounter. Midway through a rally the dog ran between the men, wagging his tail and licking his chops in well-fed contentment. Mayes, for all his engagement, stopped back to avoid treading on the mongrel. Toby, with an oath, kicked the dog in the ribs, hurling him against Mayes's legs. And while Mayes still stumbled, Toby leaped forward and knocked him cold with a low punch.

It was the second time on the passage that Ted Mayes had suffered a forced sleep through fighting. But this time he opened his eyes upon a different scene. Vaguely he heard a dog barking, men cursing, and an officer bawling. He sat up, wiping sweat from his eyes. The decks were empty of life, except on the poop where the second mate bawled and shook his fist, and under the forecastle head.

"Stop that! Stop that!" yelled the second mate.

Mayes shook his head and tried to see beyond the vague dancing shadows forward. The dog barked and snapped about the prostrate figure of Toby Scroggs; and over Toby crouched Smith, livid and chattering with fury, begging him to get on his feet and be knocked silly again for a dog-kicking swine. Mayes drew near, regarding Smith somberly.

"Let 'im be, sir, and come and look arter the men," said Mayes.

Smith straightened up, stared at the old soldier, and laughed gratingly. "Amazing Mayes!" he sneered. "Bring back my whisky, and you can talk to me. At least you don't kick a poor cur around."

"Never mind the whisky, sir," said Mayes. "It wasn't no whisky any'ow. It was nobbut wood alcohol—poison." He stumbled, groping for a hand-hold. "The secon' mate's hollerin'. Come and see 'im, and tell 'im you'll 'tend to the sick chaps."

SMITH declined, but voluntarily went about the task of feeding and watering the horses. By noon there were less than a dozen men all told, sailors, horsemen and the cook, able to be on their feet. Toward eight bells the second mate went to call the captain, and found him in a fierce fever. The second mate started to report to the mate, and was himself stricken before he could mount the companionway.

"Mayes, leave the wheel and fetch Smith aft," said the mate to Mayes, who stood uselessly by the motionless wheel, shivering strangely. "What's the matter, man?" cried the officer, peering closely into Mayes's somber face.

"Nothing, sir," said Mayes, quietly. He left the wheel grating and walked forward. "I'll bring 'im if I 'ave to carry 'im, sir."

The mate watched him go, noticed that he checked and jerked himself together. The boss horseman quarreled noisily with the two or three poor specimens left to him; they refused to go into the hold until they had rum. The boss came aft to ask about it.

"Tell 'em I can't get the keys," said the mate. "The Old Man's down; so's the steward. Tell 'em to carry on and I'll see what I can do later on."

Mayes was seeking Smith. He found him at the empty alcohol drum, trying desperately to drain a few drops out.

"Leave that poison, sir," urged Mayes. "The 'ole ship's company's likely to peg out if you don't chip in an' lend a 'and."

Smith paid no attention, except to curse between his teeth.

"That time we 'ad the plague round cantonmints, and you never slep' night nor day for a week, nursin' sick niggers, nobody never 'ad to arsk twice—"

Smith turned from the drum and laughed a dry and rattling mirthless laugh, his bloodshot eyes glaring at Mayes like a snake's. Mayes shuddered. The man puzzled him, well as he thought he knew him. He tried another line of argument on him:

"They want yer aft. There's a shipful of fever, and there's a man droppin' every few minutes. They'll give yer charge of the medicine chest, quinine, and brandy, and—"

"Amazing Mayes!" chuckled Smith, showing interest at last, and meeting Mayes's glance with a look less wild. "So they'll let me issue brandy, hey? That ought to bribe me, hey? Very well, my noble old Roman, lead on! I'll give you the first dose of brandy and quinine for getting me the job. Onward, and upward!"

"I don't want none o' yer jalap!" growled Mayes, leading the way from the hold and to the poop.

Midnight brought a zephyr which stirred the threadbare sails and moved the ship slowly forward. But it came too late to stave off the climax of the fever. Smith had taken charge of the medicine chest with much pointed profanity; and, in a steward's jacket and apron, washed and astonishingly different to the Smith of the stables, he had made the dreary rounds of the sick, followed eagerly by Mayes bearing his medicines. Mayes had lost all habit of speech since Smith took the duty, watching him narrowly, half fearfully. But Smith, with the medicine chest key in his keeping, and the small stock of medicinal spirit at his hand, puzzled Mayes. He had begun by pouring out a half-tumbler of aromatic spirits of ammonia, and a good stiff drink of whisky and quinine. Mayes had watched the operation with misgivings. So had the mate. But Smith gave the whisky to the mate, bidding him swallow it for his health's sake, and himself swallowed the pungent stimulant of ammonia. After which, laughing so nearly sanely that the mate regarded him askance, he poured another glass of whisky and quinine, and handed it to Mayes.

"Drink it, old Roman," he said. "You're ready to drop yourself."

MAYES followed him until every sick man had been ministered to; but few got whisky with their quinine. Then the midnight breeze made sail-trimming necessary, and steering, and there were few men to answer the call. What few there were hauled listlessly at the braces, with the only result that the yards were raggedly trimmed. Men who were barely able to stand could scarcely be expected to haul heavy yards to a nicety after a day of broiling under a pitiless sun.

"Come on, you, give's a pull 'ere!" Mayes bawled to Toby, who had suddenly been stricken with fear of loneliness in the fetid forecastle and stuck near to the poop. He had lost his belligerence. He followed Mayes and Smith around, muttering, almost whimpering.

" 'Vast hauling, and belay," the mate sang out. "Let the yards hang till morning."

There was no use in beating down the poor remnant of the crew by working them when a change of course would fill the sails as well. If the men recovered soon the ship would lose little time after what she had already lost; if they didn't recover, it wouldn't matter anyhow. Mayes went up the poop ladder, with Toby following. And Mayes licked his walrus mustache reminiscently as he caught sight of Smith taking the temperature of the skipper in the dim light of the chart house.

MAYES stood four hours at the wheel that night, and slept on the wheel gratings. When he was aroused to start another day, the east was rosy with promise of wind, and Smith was feeling his pulse. Toby Scroggs stood at the wheel, with the red-eyed mate standing over him.

"Drink this, old Roman," Smith said, holding a tumbler under his bristling mustache.

"That bloke at the wheel wants it more'n me," said Mayes, and cut short Smith's sarcastic comment by swallowing the dose at a gulp. It made his eyes water.

"Thought you was givin' me 'monia," he grumbled. " 'Monia's wot 'e wants, though. 'E carn't stand whisky."

He went to the wheel, staggering a bit. The mate scanned him narrowly.

"Feel all right, Mayes? Take care of yourself. You go with Smith to visit the sick. I'll keep Scroggs here with me. Try and get some of the men out on deck. They'll rot like sheep in that stinkin' forecastle."

Before starting on his rounds, Smith gave Toby a dose of spirits of ammonia which made him sneeze and weep; it also made him savagely resentful, so that he was good for many hours more of wakefulness, brooding over the vengeance he would take when things returned to normal. Then the two ministering angels, so queerly paired, gave the sick their tenderest care, performing all the unpleasant duties of doctor and nurse with profanity and thoroughness. In the hold, where the horsemen lived, the atmosphere was frightful, for the horses had not been cleaned the previous day. Here Smith produced a quart of brandy, pulled Mayes behind a partition, and gave him a stiff ration.

"Drop o' good stuff, that, sir," said Mayes with a wink.

"I'll take a peg myself," said Smith, and took one with shaking hand.

" 'Ere's two blokes as looks to be shammin'," said Mayes, his mustache bristling fiercely as the brandy took hold. He had drunk three stiff pegs since midnight, and none for a long time before that.

"Those two blokes are dead," said Smith after a glance. "Drag 'em out."

In the forecastle death and bedlam reigned. Smith and Mayes labored like heroes, striving to make cleanliness out of foulness, dragging sick men out into the fresh air, hurling the bedding of dead men overboard beyond power to harm the living. It was eight o'clock before they left the last man, and the brandy bottle was empty. Smith was grinning; Mayes tottered, but sang as he weaved aft:

"Wrop me hup in me tarpaulin jacket,
And say a pore sailor lies low, lies low;
And six stalwart jack tars shall carry me
Wiv steps ever mournful an' slow."

"If you must sing such a damned dirge, sing it right, you drunken defaulter!" snarled Smith, shaking Mayes savagely with a nervously powerful hand.

"I know wot I'm doin', sir, and don't shake me!" growled Mayes, his mustache standing out like a brush.

A haggard mate received Smith's report, then took the key of the medicine chest from him.

"Better snatch a rest now, Smith," he said. "I'll carry on with Mayes until you come on again. You all right, Mayes?" He looked at the old soldier suspiciously.

"I'm 'appy, sir," said Mayes, and carried on with his song:

"When I am dead and buried,
All the ladies 'll want to, I know, I know,
Just lift hup the lid of my coffin
And weep hon this sailor below!"

"You're drunk!" charged the mate.

"Better me than 'im," retorted Mayes, nodding after Smith. "Don't worry about me, sir. I'm goin' to bring the 'osses on deck. They'll stifle down there in that 'orrid 'ole."

The mate was in no condition to argue. He was on the verge of collapse; the ship was sailing at increasing speed wide of her course, with nobody to trim sail so that she might head right; from the open hatches came such a reek, such sounds of equine distress, as to wring the soul of any one but a brute. Smith staggered into the chart room, and gave the moaning skipper attention before flinging himself on the floor in exhaustion. Mayes sang the rest of his song, and went into the hold. Soon, after a period of thundering hoofs and old army profanity, Mayes appeared at the head of the horse gangway, leading a rawboned gray Waler and singing at the top of his pipes:

"For 'eaven I know I'm not good enough,
And to 'ell I don't want ter gow, ter gow;
I wish there was some place between 'em
To which a pore sailor might gow!"

There was a lively motion to the ship by this time. The tall gray, feeling the open deck and the fresh air, kicked up his heels and broke away from Mayes, galloping madly around the deck and neighing his delight. Mayes stood looking after him comically. Then the next horse came up, untended, following the led leader, and after him the rest, galloping around the spacious decks like wild colts until the ship was a rumbling cavern of thunder.

"THE 'orses are up, sir!" Mayes reported to the mate, who was all but dropping at the wheel. "Hey, sir, the 'orses are up!"

The mate nodded, let go the spokes, and fell to the deck, asleep before he was down.

"'Elpless blokes, sailors!" remarked Mayes, and took the wheel.

Mayes knew the day was waning because the sun grew large and red near the western sea line. He had steered and sung, and kept an eye on the men within reach. Giving water to the skipper, quinine to the second mate below, covering the mate's face from the sun, giving a keen glance to Smith, who slept heavily. Then the brandy in him died, and he felt heavy himself. He nodded at the wheel as the sun dipped, and he pulled himself together sharply.

"'Twon't do, me son, 'twon't do!" he muttered, and knelt beside the mate.

He searched for and found the medicine chest key, shaking the mate first without result. He shook Smith, who cursed him without opening his eyes. He found Toby, stirred him with his foot. Toby began to sing "Abel Brown," but could not be awakened.

"Them sick blokes must be looked after," said Mayes, talking aloud although to himself. "I dunno where we're steering, so it don't make no difference whether I steer or not. Look after yerself, *'Otspur.*"

Taking out quinine, he lifted the upper compartment of the medicine chest and found a lone bottle of brandy. He drank one long, gurgling swallow, stuck the bottle under the skipper's pillow without arousing him, and started out to make the sick rounds before darkness came. He looked again at Smith. The man lay in a deathlike stupor, impervious to any amount of shaking. Mayes regarded him gravely. He felt afraid of that stupor. But he had seen Smith minister to every man in the ship, expertly and thoroughly, and believed that any man could now follow on and repeat the treatment in any but a hopeless case.

So around he went. Six sailors who had fled from the forecastle after the horses watched him, but kept out of his way. Smith had dosed them with quinine, after Toby had assured them it would be whisky they would get. They trusted Mayes no more than Smith. Long before the end of his rounds, Mayes had to light a lantern; but he finished, saw every man, did what he could to make him comfortable, gave water and a profane word of encouragement to each. He was staggering wildly when he had done, but he went to the wheel, and tried to remember what course he had been told to steer. He could not recall it. Somehow his memory seemed hazy, and his vision would not clear. He discovered there was no light in the binnacle, so he left the wheel to get one.

"'Elpless lot o' blokes, sailors," he muttered as he stumbled around. "Without no officer to drag 'em around by the snoot they're lorst! 'Ullo! 'Oo's this?"

The derelict mongrel, rendered bold by loneliness, crept upon the poop and capered madly about his legs as he put the lamp in the binnacle.

"'Ere, yer marster's in 'ere, puppy. Take care of 'im. I got to look arter all 'ands."

He led the cur to Smith, saw it creep close and lie down, whining, then went back to the helm and brought the ship to her last course. He spread his legs wide to keep erect, holding the wheel spokes in a fierce grip. Things began to whirl before his eyes. He was almost dead asleep on his feet. He saw a line of palm trees sail across the starry sky over the ship's bows, and rubbed his eyes drowsily, knowing them to be just other things that bothered his vision. A horse neighed, and he swore bitterly, for he was trying to think of a good old song which would keep him awake. The line of trees sailed back across the sky line, and the spoke of the wheel struck him in the side. He swore again, at the ship, unaware that the breeze had abruptly died to a zephyr again, letting the ship swing off.

He thought of his song and opened his mouth to sing, but the words refused to come. He nodded so heavily that his head struck the wheel. Looking up stupidly he saw several capering figures before him on the poop, near the ladders. He thought he heard alarmed voices, too; but figures and voices were only in his drowsy brain, he was sure. His head struck the wheel again, and he stared at the lighted binnacle. The little lighted card was swinging mesmerically. He grumbled at it. The capering figures capered still more wildly. He was sure he heard voices now. He could swear that line of trees suddenly came to a standstill over the bow. Then he felt his knees bend; his fierce mustache brushed the wheel, and he fell into a deep, peaceful sleep on the hard grating as the *Hotspur* gently slid up on to soft ground, listed over easily, and came to rest with the fronds of a line of palm trees brushing her lower yardarms.

THERE was the rich, earthy smell of green grass and roots. The horses caught it, and the tall gray Waler started to kick out the bulwarks to get at the source of it. Another, brainier horse, one of the Calcutta racers, sniffed twice, then drew back, ran, and cleared the bulwarks like a bird, plunging into the still dark sea, unhurt, and swimming joyously ashore. Horse after horse followed. The mongrel dog jumped up, barking, then went and tried to drag Smith out to look.

One by one, the less ill of the sailors and horsemen staggered to the rail, and speedily became still less ill. There is something magical in the smell of Mother Earth to the fevered. Smith got up, looked around him, and apparently failed to grasp the situation. The dog leaped frantically beside him; men appeared from all parts of the ship, sniffing at the shore, amazingly recovering. Smith saw the prostrate figure of the mate, and stealthily rummaged for the key of the medicine chest. He failed to find it; grinning, he tried Mayes, and found what he sought. But search of the chest disappointed him.

Smith had returned to the poop-deck, and was feeling all over Mayes's clothes when the ship gently heeled over a bit more, and the skipper tottered on deck, bewildered, but rapidly recovering. He too sniffed the earthy smell. He turned and scanned the outline of the land against the sky.

"H'm! Table Island!" he muttered. "Couldn't very well have put her in a safer place. Who did it?"

Turning, he saw Smith, in his white jacket and apron, kneeling over Mayes. Awakened by some secret instinct, the mate sat up, stared, and stumbled to his feet, brushing the mists from his eyes. He met the skipper's eye, in the dim radiance of the binnacle light; and there was no reproof there.

"If the ship isn't damaged, Mister, this may be a life-saver," said the skipper. "There's fresh water here, and wild fruit, and grass. But how about the men?" He glanced toward Smith, still on his knees beside Mayes. "I see you have taken them in hand, Smith. Are there many—"

"Two horsemen and two sailors dead, that's all," said Smith, curtly.

"You won't lose by it," the skipper promised. He turned again, and Smith saw in his hand the bottle of brandy he had been looking for. "Here," the skipper added. "Take this and put it back, Smith. Some idiot put it under my pillow. I don't believe I did it myself. You've got the medicine chest key, I suppose?"

Smith took the bottle, without eagerness now. He went back to Mayes. The rough shirt was open, and the deep chest rose and fell evenly. The brushlike, belligerent mustache stuck upward, stirred at every breath. Smith had taken up his wrist to feel the pulse, but he let it drop again, and grinned, not unpleasantly. Words were trickling through that fierce mustache, though the speaker was dead to the world.

" 'Elpless lot o' blokes, sailors! S' 'elp me! If they 'aven't got no orficer to lead 'em around by the snoot they're lorst. 'Aven't got no bowels, neither, when they get sick. Oughter 'ave been wiv our lot out in Rawalpindi—"

"Amazing Mayes!" chuckled Smith, and stepped silently below to replace the bottle of brandy in the chest.

A Novel Complete in This Issue

CONQUEST

To Every Man at One Time or Another Comes Dissatisfaction with His Own Accomplishment—Even, It May Be, to a Financier at the Peak of Success

By Jay Gelzer

Illustrations by Harley E. Stivers

THE evening that was to prove momentous for Ethan Howard began quite like other, less eventful evenings.

At five o'clock he emerged from the tall building which housed his offices, delayed beyond his usual hour of departure by the inopportune arrival of an important associate. As Jules, his chauffeur, drew up alongside the curb, he noted that the man had brought down the new town car, just arrived from abroad, for his first ride.

Greeting the man with his customary courtesy, he voiced his appreciation of the beauty of shining enamel and excellence of design.

"She's a beauty, eh, Jules? Nothing finer!"

Jules murmured something indistinctly, but the manner in which he opened the door paid homage to the car.

Ethan Howard settled himself on the luxurious cushions with a mounting pride of ownership. Again he told himself that there was nothing finer in all New York, where the possession of wealth was not in any way remarkable.

Knowledge that he possessed the best added to his sense of congratulatory well-being. He leaned back, expansive in mood, comparing his present lot with his humble beginning, and finding his self-esteem subtly stroked by the comparison.

He had had so little—and now he had so much!

For a dozen blocks or so his pride of ownership lingered, casting a pleasant glow over the finish of his day. Then, abruptly, his pleasure was deflated. Already the novelty had worn off, and the car had fitted into the routine of his days. Possession, he told himself disconsolately, staled so quickly.

A sharp disappointment that this was so pervaded him at the thought, although he mentally arraigned his discontent as being childish.

He had—why, *everything!*

At once, wrinkling his brow in perplexity, he perceived in this very statement the possible source of his dissatisfaction: The man who had everything had nothing left to long for, had no new desire to gratify. And the man with no new desire to gratify was robbed of his power of anticipation, since, after all, all life was lived in the hope of gratifying various desires.

This, Ethan Howard told himself thoughtfully, was profoundly true. His own desires, sometimes practical, sometimes hopelessly impractical, had nevertheless been the various steps by which he had mounted the ladder of success. He had, in the beginning, possessed nothing at all, had had everything to want for: comfort, luxury, achievement, power! His very desires had driven him upward; upon their strength had depended the measure of his progress. But now, with all his desires gratified—

Ethan Howard sighed a desolate realization of the truth: Life began to be a dull business for the man who had nothing left to wish for.

Europe, the steam yacht with its crew, his impressive suite of offices, his palatial apartment—variously he summed up the things his success had procured for him. Or had longing for these various things procured his success for him? Impossible to say! At any rate, none of his early dreams remained unrealized. There was a pathos in that thought.

Looking backward, he saw that each dream as it had been made real had represented something more than the realization of a dream. Each had brought with it some quality of conquest vitally necessary to him. Now, rather wistfully, he regretted that he had not even one unfulfilled dream left to him, that it had not been possible for him to dream more extensively. There were, it seemed, limits to a man's power of desire.

Again he said it, with a tinge of bitterness: He had everything; life had nothing more to offer him.

The shining new car turned into a side street, where it was delayed a little by a congestion of traffic and his undirected gaze idly sought the glow of light cast forth by an unshaded bedroom window.

A WOMAN sat on a low bench before a dressing table, plainly revealed in the rectangle of warm light. With both hands she held a string of pearls against the white of her long slim throat. From her upraised arms, also slim and white, loose flowing sleeves fell away.

As Ethan Howard continued to gaze at the picture, his eye caught and held by the glow of light, a man came and stood behind the seated woman, bending down in a pose of unmistakable affection.

She saw him in the glass, apparently uttered a cry, and dropping the pearls, leaned back against him in a possessive rapture of greeting which took Ethan Howard by the throat.

The momentary traffic jam dissipated, his car moved on, leaving him with the picture of the lighted room printed indelibly upon his memory.

A futile business anyhow, looking in on other people's lives, he told himself restlessly. And then, with the unknown woman's abandon of gladness sharply distinct before him, it came to Ethan Howard that he had, after all, one remaining unrealized dream.

It was a very simple dream, so simple that he had thrust it away and forgotten it, his interest entirely engaged in his battle for success. Nothing more than every man's dream of a feminine figure at his side, challenging, companionable, promising to contribute something to his happiness beyond the power of other dreams to contribute.

The dream had been his a long, long time, tucked away safely somewhere in his brain. Now, released by something glimpsed in the couple in the window, it was so suddenly and strongly ascendant that he wondered just why this particular dream had gone long unrealized. So long, in fact, that he had all but forgotten it.

Very probably, he concluded, some obscure fastidiousness of choice in himself was responsible. For instance, the thick-ankled, dull-brained women accessible to him in the days of his obscure beginning—they were not compatible with his secret dream. He'd wanted somebody of unusual quality, even in those days when his discrimination seemed to be only arrogance. And quite possibly he'd so strongly wanted somebody of unusual quality in all the years which came after, that his insistence upon this predetermined quality represented the reason he was still alone.

Alone!

The word invaded his musings unpleasantly; so unpleasantly that it occurred to him to wonder if he had reached the point where he was ready to grasp at any association which would serve to terminate his aloneness, forgoing his secret dream. There was marriage; many men sought in marriage a refuge from loneliness and boredom, but, once accomplished, did marriage prove the longed-for refuge?

He had lived far too long, was far too wise, not to have grasped the essential loneliness which is a part of every individual soul. What could there be in marriage to mitigate that essential loneliness? And wouldn't possession stale as quickly in relation to human beings as to inanimate objects?

His observation of marriage among his

intimates convinced him that this was so. A more or less short term of rapture, a growing disillusionment, then a friendly indifference, an unfriendly indifference, or the divorce court, only to try again. In other strata of society, no doubt marriage was on a different plane: a partnership, a pooling of resources. . . .

Ethan Howard smiled, realizing that he was ignoring in his summing up of marriage the quality invariably put forth first: love. But what was love? Did anybody know? And did it really exist? Wasn't it, rather, nature's greatest illusion?

Involuntarily he was reminded of the eager outpouring of love plainly manifest in the unknown woman's embrace, and was compelled to recognize it as such. There was, then, love in the world. Some people had it, and it might conceivably make life utterly worth while. Admitting this, he was aware of a profound lack in his own scheme of things.

People who married became unhappy and separated, and more often than not married again. There was, then, something they glimpsed briefly, even though it failed them, which laid upon them a necessity for the inevitable pursuit of happiness conceded even by the Pilgrim fathers.

Leaning back in a corner of the car, he continued his questionings. With a mounting and eager interest, he probed deep into his own personality as far as he understood it. Had he need of a refuge from himself? Or was his restlessness merely the pressure of a sole remaining unfulfilled dream exerting its influence upon him?

He need not, Ethan Howard told himself bluntly, continue to live alone. Fair women in plenty stood willing, even eager, to share his aloneness and his wealth.

THERE was, for instance, Marge Lansing, with her gift of smart dressing, and her equally smart conversation. Marge was undeniably acquisitive, but she was never dull. She was, moreover, of one of the leading families socially. Good blood, but impoverished.

Also there was Hilaire Armbruster, with her pink and white candylike prettiness. Hilaire had been twice married. Most unhappily, she was apt to confide, with an appealing upward glance of soft blue eyes.

Twice unhappily married? His common sense cynically warned him. Many first marriages were mistakes, but one mistake would serve to prove the advisability of choosing more wisely. Two mistakes! Ethan Howard smiled. She was grasping, was pretty pink and white Hilaire Armbruster, rapacious, beneath that soft prettiness of hers!

Even loneliness could be preferable to other fates, he concluded, changing his position against the fawn-colored cushions. Through the plate-glass front window his eyes rested an appreciative moment upon the liveried back of his chauffeur.

Clever driver, Jules. And honest! No bills for unnecessary repairs on which Jules drew a percentage. He must raise the man's salary.

Again and again, as the car proceeded up the Drive, his memory printed the picture of the pair in the window before his eyes: the man, the woman, and their mutual love.

Marge Lansing: he smiled.

Hilaire Armbruster: again he smiled.

Neither of these could give him what he wanted. What he wanted, he decided reluctantly, was exactly what the two in the window had had.

At his apartment building, he stepped out of the car, was carried aloft in an elevator presided over by a grinning Jamaican in a scarlet uniform, and felt his own door open at the precise moment he inserted his key.

Taka, his Japanese man, stood bowing before him, his breath sucked in respectfully in greeting.

Involuntarily comparing the impersonality of Taka's greeting with the picture of the lighted window, Ethan Howard felt his discontent focus sharply.

Impossible to tell if even Taka liked him; and he had an odd and almost childish wish to be liked, to be insulated from this depressing feeling of loneliness by a warm current of human liking.

Going into his library, with its impressive furnishings, he stood a moment frowning down into the street below. The lamps outside glittered palely through a thin, icy November drizzle. Except for passing cars, the street was empty.

Taka murmured discreetly at his elbow, reminding him that he was having guests for dinner, and suggesting that he approve the table.

Disinterestedly he strolled into the room where a table was set in readiness for his guests. It was a room of distinction, paved with squares of black and white marble. Dull crimson draperies hung at the windows, touched with old gold, and a high, carved sideboard towered almost to the ceiling.

The table was long and narrow, glittering bravely with fine china, silver, and crystal. Apparently, however, the dinner was to be a small one, for only six places were laid.

Taka hovered about with a manner of intense anxiety. The table had been his special pride, and presently he would assume the duties of butler. Another Japanese presided over the kitchen. Through a door leading to the rear, Ethan Howard caught faint sounds of activity.

The table was perfect in every detail.

He said so, in a tone of hearty praise, to Taka. Perfection of detail appealed to him immensely, particularly perfection of detail in the things which went to make up his comfort.

With a lingering eye upon the gloss of satin damask, the sparkle of glass, and the gleam of silver, he added a final word of approval and gave a last instruction.

"Serve the salad in those new black crystal plates."

"I do," beamed Taka.

Ethan Howard withdrew, a momentary vision of the salad against the black plates and the black plates in sharp relief against the spotless table linen clear in his mind.

He had a sense of color, and quite a range of prejudice. For instance, he vastly preferred table linen to doilies, and chairs to the idiotic benches so prevalent.

Back again in the library, he sank into a deep, all-embracing chair. Taka held a match to the cigar he extracted from the humidor on a low stand beside him, placed a footstool beneath his feet, adjusted a reading-lamp conveniently, and laid the evening papers ready at hand.

ETHAN HOWARD expanded in the aura of well-being which surrounded him. For a moment he heartily pitied the poor devils lacking means to be similarly comfortable. He, Ethan Howard, knew what lack could mean. Once—he'd lived a week on a loaf of bread and a paper package of oatmeal. *He knew!*

Luxury—how it took a man, and wrapped around his soul! And how foolish, this popular attitude of contempt toward money! Money was all—no, nearly all that mattered.

A man without money to indulge his wants was in prison, limited from the start. He had no opportunity to indulge his generosity, to favor his own process of growth. Cynics and idealists insisted that wealth and success operated to kill all that was best in a man. Poverty, Ethan Howard told himself slowly, did so no less, and far less pleasantly.

Agreeably he recognized the fact that his dinner tonight would be perfect. Food, service, company—he paused over the final item.

Who were his guests of the evening?

Marge Lansing and Hilaire Armbruster, no doubt. Their rivalry for his favor amused him, flattering his vanity pleasantly. The others? He'd forgotten.

At any rate, they would all come. Invitations to his dinners were eagerly sought. He was a lavish host. . . .

Taka entered; extended a silver tray upon which reposed a single cocktail. Pre-war stuff, Ethan Howard recognized appreciatively, lifting the tiny glass from the tray. It was difficult to tell what you were drinking nowadays, but in his own home he could be sure.

The mellow sting of the cocktail soothed away the last traces of his depression. That, he reflected, was what alcohol was for: to exert an ameliorating influence upon the sharp facts of life.

"You dress now?" suggested Taka, lingering.

Ethan Howard looked at his watch. Seven o'clock: dinner was to be at eight. Yes, he'd better dress. Dressing was almost a rite with him, to be observed with due care. The sense of luxury attained by a well-planned toilet achieved without haste delighted him with its contrast to the days when, with a light in his cap, and sweat-stained dungarees on his back, he had delved for coal with a pick in the mines of Illinois.

A coal mine! He had indeed climbed high: from the darkness of ill-paid work far underground to the security of this apartment and all that lay behind it.

Scars of that climbing remained with him.

Flexing his powerful hands, Ethan Howard looked down at them speculatively. Scarred and distorted from the existing ideal of beauty for masculine hands, they had yet served him well.

A miner in the coal pits!

The muscular development across his shoulders which would always be there, was born of the rhythmical rise and fall of a pick. . . .

"You dress?" repeated Taka, with a rising inflection.

"I'll dress."

With a swift lunge he rose to his feet.

His evening clothes were laid out on his bed, admirably pressed. His shirt was a miracle of perfect laundering. His pumps and sheer silk hose were ready. On the dresser lay the new black pearl studs he had recently acquired at a staggering price. There were no others quite like them in the city, the jeweler had said, with an air of respect for his own wares. There it was again: his own intense wish to have nothing but the best!

The warm depths of his bath soothed and relaxed him pleasantly. And presently Taka kneaded his muscles with a scented oil until his flesh was pink and glowing, and all traces of the fatigue of the day were wiped away.

Ethan Howard smiled at the fancy that his body was as exquisitely tended as a bit of fine machinery. Wasn't that the way it should be? Wasn't the human body the finest bit of machinery ever achieved? Care and attention kept it in perfect condition: Taka's care and attention kept his own body from looking its forty-five years.

Again the odd overflow of pity at the contrast between his own lot and that of less fortunate people overcame him. He had a generous wish that everybody in the world might be as successful and as comfortable as himself. Perhaps selfish, that wish. Contemplation of the lack which was the portion of innumerable others fretted his own enjoyment of what his energy had procured for him.

Energy—was that the secret of success? Luck? He had had them both, but after a prolonged consideration of the matter, he concluded that a dogged persistence in the face of discouragement outranked everything else.

Taka finished, breathless, bowing.

"You dress?"

Studying his firm rosy flesh with impersonal interest, Ethan Howard decided that the male body could rival the female in beauty. A stronger, less appealing beauty, perhaps, but undeniably beauty.

Renewed pity for those deprived of services such as Taka's flooded through him. Women especially, deprived of the opportunity to care properly for their beauty, grew old and haggard speedily. Poverty was hard on women, harder by far than on men.

Shrugging into his bathrobe, he recalled an incident of his tempestuous, ambitious youth: a love affair, almost.

A RUSSIAN girl, one of the strange colony of all nations attracted to the mines, had caught his fancy. Her skin was smooth and cool and white, her eyes flaming; and a scarlet handkerchief bound her deep black hair. To the young Ethan Howard she had represented the mystery of woman.

There had been a Sunday in spring when they had gone to the woods together and, like two children, reveled in the blue of the sky, the gold of the sunshine, the green of the grass and trees after the darkness of the mine.

Her name was Olga, and he'd had a desire to call her that, to see the color riot in her cheeks, to touch her soft throat with his rough hand, to touch the tiny pulse which throbbed there.

He'd even put out his hand, and then, of a sudden, stopped and drawn the hand back. Perhaps, if he had laid his hand over the pulse in Olga's throat, all his life would have been different. So small an act can shape a destiny! He would, perhaps, have been submerged beneath cares and responsibilities into the ranks of hundreds of others who sought the mine each morning.

That chilling thought had come to him then, staying his hand. The mine, for him, was but an incident on his passage up; for Olga's husband, perhaps a permanency.

He had withheld his hand, but for a moment an emotion overpoweringly sweet had hung in the air between himself and Olga, all jumbled up with the fair, smiling day, and the lift and fall of Olga's breast.

For years the sweetness of that moment, and the liquid depth of Olga's eyes, had haunted him. Now unaccountably these merged into the picture of the woman in the window.

Those two moments were all he knew of love, and love, according to the pronouncement of many, was what made life worth while.

His dissatisfaction was returning. Annoyed with his own mood, he finished dressing. Taka flicked an imaginary speck of dust from the patent-leather shoes, presented him with a handkerchief of fine linen, delicately scented, and, stepping back, made a quaint sound of approval.

It was as much Taka's job to turn him out perfect in detail as to see that the dinner table was perfect. . . .

Interestedly he studied himself in the tall glass hanging on the wall. Tall, powerfully built, not handsome, but with the distinction of strength and power, he was satisfied with his appearance. A personality! The glance of his blue eyes was direct and masterful, the curling blond hair on his head was thick and vigorous. He looked mature, but not old.

A man women might love? He pondered over the question. How could he tell? How separate himself from his belongings?

A futility, that desire to be loved for self alone! Was any man ever loved for self alone? Didn't the most disinterested woman in the world instinctively seek in her chosen man the possibilities of protection and comfort? It was natural, entirely natural, that she should. Feminine instinct was both thrifty and cautious. The female, perceiving its inevitable time of helplessness, looked to the male for security.

What a lot of sentimental rot the world was nourished on, anyhow.

Driven by his haunting restlessness, he went over to his bedroom window, and once more stood looking out. Far below, on a wet asphalt street, cars were moving slowly to and fro, all filled with people necessarily confronted with the same problems that besieged himself. Again Ethan Howard had a profound conviction of life's futility. A squirrel-cage sort of business, was living.

His hand released the web of fine lace draping the window—a tinted lace, faintly and exquisitely pink. Sea-green drapes of an iridescent taffeta outlined it. Five thousand dollars for the draperies—more than his whole year's income had once been!

He moved toward the room where he would shortly receive his guests, leaving Taka in the act of hanging up various garments.

Passing down the hall, he paused to open the door of the guest room where his women guests would lay aside their wraps.

Purple carpeting covered the floor of this room, so dark it was almost black in effect. The furniture was painted apple-green. Lace spreads covered the beds. From the dressing table came the glimmer of pearl and crystal toilet articles.

CLICKING on the shaded wall lights, he concentrated his gaze upon the low seat before the dressing table.

Involuntarily he pictured a woman there, in a gown of soft silk, sleeves flowing back from her upraised arms.

So vivid was the picture that he walked toward the dressing table and stood behind the low bench, looking down in almost the exact pose of the unknown man in the window.

Immediately, disconcerted by the blank emptiness of the seat, he laughed impatiently at his own folly.

How utterly mad of him! What could be gained by encouraging these sentimental fancies?

Again he repeated the pronouncement he had made earlier in the evening.

"I've everything!" he said to himself.

And then, from terror-smitten depths, came the admission:

"And perhaps nothing at all that really matters!"

His guests were arriving: he heard Taka at the outer door, ushering them in. Almost immediately Hilaire Armbruster, in a soft white cloak, her pink and white face half hidden by its high collar, entered the room, brushing past him smilingly.

"Come and help me with my wrap, Ethan."

Obediently he followed her, knowing that Taka would take care of the men. Already he could hear an appreciative chuckle from his own room. Taka was popular with his guests.

He laid Hilaire's snowy cloak, carefully folded, upon one of the two green painted beds.

"What a lovely room!" praised Hilaire restlessly. "You've wonderful taste for a man, Ethan."

"Taste," returned Ethan Howard deliberately, "is something which can be bought, like anything else."

The remark was unpremeditatedly brutal. He hadn't meant any personal significance, but Hilaire colored vividly, perhaps from her own inner sense of guilt.

It was her most engaging habit, this trick of coloring vividly and immediately destroying the preconceived impression that she was entirely artificial. Natural, that exquisite coloring of hers!

Hilaire was lovely tonight, he conceded appreciatively. She wore a dress of the misty blue of certain spring flowers. Her slender and perfect shoulders were revealed by the dress, which expressed more than concealed her undeniable beauty.

Perfection—and he so admired perfection! The gold of perfectly dressed hair, the white of perfectly kept skin, the fire of perfect eyes. Even as he summed up her charm, Hilaire went and sat upon the low seat before the dressing table.

"Look away, Ethan," she commanded lightly, "whilst I touch up my aged complexion."

Affectation, all of it. Had her complexion not been exquisitely natural, Hilaire would never have called attention to it. An odd feeling of disappointment flooded through Ethan Howard, but he crossed over and stood behind her, looking down.

Hilaire glanced up at him, coquettishly, her head thrown far back.

"Kiss me, Ethan!" she whispered.

Obediently he bent low; kissed Hilaire, aware of steadily deepening disappointment.

Hilaire straightened vexedly.

"It doesn't mean anything to you!" she accused.

"No," he admitted honestly. "It doesn't seem to, Hilaire. I only wish it did."

He was quite sincere in his regret. A kiss could mean anything, a kiss could mean nothing at all. He deplored his own lack of emotion. Hilaire was beautiful enough to stir any man's pulse.

But that, perhaps, was not what he wanted. Or, along with it, he wanted something more, it being impossible entirely to divorce spiritual and physical hungers. One didn't, of course, marry for thrills, not if one were wise. And yet?

He shrugged impatiently at his own reflections. Now he was getting back to his previous gloomy recognition that possession staled quickly. To avoid staling, possession must never be fully realized. There must, then, be something never quite possessed, a person of infinite possibilities if interest was to be maintained.

Infinite possibilities: his mind closed down upon the phrase.

He'd hit it! Hilaire had only her rose and white and gold prettiness to offer; nothing to withhold. And for himself the secret of attraction lay not in what was given, but in what was withheld.

MARGE LANSING hailed him from the doorway. Had she watched the brief sentimental scene? He was quite undisturbed at the thought.

Going forward to greet her, he drew her into his arms matter-of-factly.

"I have just kissed Hilaire, which means that I must by all means kiss you, Marge, it being my strict rule to play no favorites."

Marge offered her lips acquiescently.

He kissed her, as many other men doubtless had, and in doing so caught a faint perfume from her hair. Emotionally the experience was disappointing, the same utter blankness of sensation assailing him as when he kissed Hilaire.

Gently he released her, drew off her cloak of gold cloth. Marge emerged with a blare of gorgeous color which was almost an audible shriek against the delicate colors of the room.

She was slender and dark, clad in scarlet, her arms heavy with barbaric bracelets of beaten gold. Beside the cool beauty of the other woman, her display of color was almost wanton in effect.

Marge knew, was exulting in the fact. The eyes of the two women met in a sudden upflare of enmity even while they exchanged friendly greetings.

"Hullo, Hilaire darling! Who brought you tonight?"

"I came alone. But Ethan is seeing me home!"

There was a sparkle of triumph in Hilaire's blue eyes.

Ethan Howard smiled inwardly. He

hadn't intended taking Hilaire home, but it amused him to further her in the small advantage she had seized.

"I'll find you quite as interesting an escort," he promised Marge, smiling—"and one who is even wealthier than my unworthy self."

Marge swept his face lightly with her plumed fan.

"The money counts—I'm being honest with you, Ethan. It simply has to count with a woman like me! But it wouldn't be hard to like you for yourself alone. You're not unattractive exactly, Ethan."

She moved away, laughing, and he followed, nearer to deep interest in her at that moment than he had ever been before. She was being honest with him, in her way. And her manner had been almost wistful.

Hilaire intercepted him, her fingers laid confidentially upon his arm, her eyes upraised to his.

"You don't *mind* seeing me home, Ethan?"

"A pleasure!" he assured, but with so palpable a withdrawal that Hilaire pouted openly.

In the room where the first of his men guests were waiting, a cheerful fire burned in the fireplace. The central chandelier in this room was wrought of innumerable bits of hand-cut glass, assembled with silver. Prismatic gleams of light escaped the twinkling bits of glass: blue, violet, orange, rose. The room fairly blazed with light.

A fancy of his own, this glass chandelier. And one not popular with his women guests. Too much light fretted women with its unkindness to their defects. Women lived by illusion, and light was necessarily fatal to illusion.

Hilaire raised her hands to her eyes protestingly.

"Ethan, positively barbaric, this glare is!"

Ethan Howard motioned sardonically to Taka. Taka touched the controlling switch. The chandelier went out, the sudden withdrawal of light creating an emptiness in the room.

"My Lord!" exclaimed Salisbury Jones, almost in awe. "It's like something alive, that chandelier!"

The two women settled themselves in their chairs gracefully. Salisbury Jones went to the piano in the adjoining music room, and played fitfully. He played, as he did most things, indifferently well.

It occurred to Ethan Howard, as it had many times before, that Salisbury Jones had all the vital elements of greatness but one: the need to use them. He had just enough wealth to secure him from want; not enough to gratify his expensive desires, but too much at any rate to confer upon him the sense of need which would have served as a spur.

"How many of us are there?" questioned Ethan Howard. "Let's see: there are to be two others; the table is set for six. But—"

Marge Lansing laughed. "Don't you know?"

"No," he confessed. "I don't! So let's ask Taka."

Taka competently produced a memorandum book.

"Mist' Jones, Mis' Lansing, Mis' Armbruster, Mist' Park, Mis' Steele." He finished, bowing.

"Mrs. Steele?" repeated Ethan Howard. "But I don't know any Mrs. Steele!"

Taka bowed again. "Mist' Park bring," he explained.

Ethan Howard's brow cleared. "Now I remember! Park's my legal man, and he asked permission to bring a lady. As I am always glad to meet new and beautiful ladies—"

Marge Lansing laughed indulgently. Hilaire was resentful.

"Perhaps she won't be beautiful!" said Hilaire coldly.

"Park *said* she was," he countered.

Somewhere the muffled note of a bell resounded. Taka disappeared.

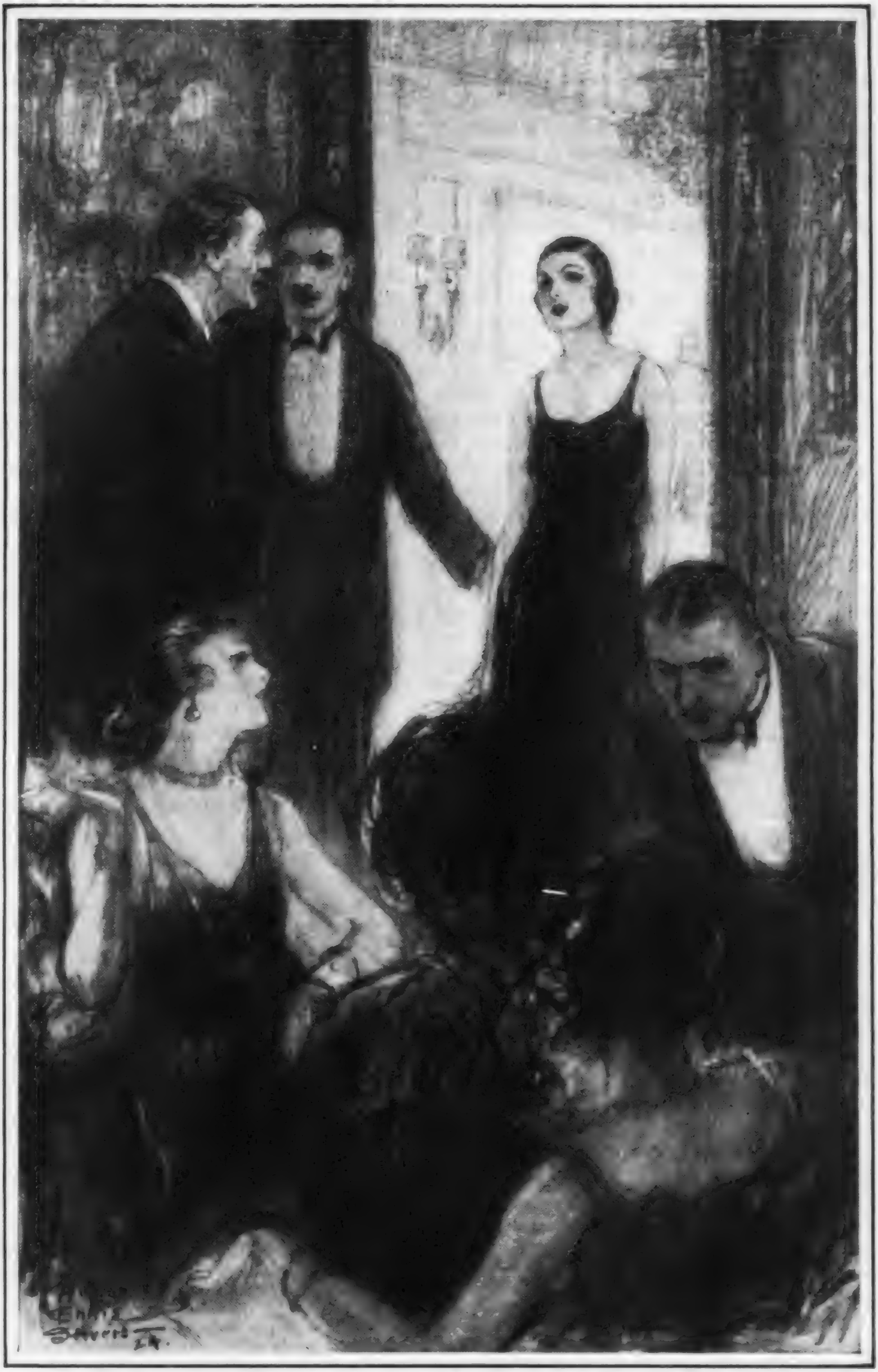
"I'll reserve judgment," smiled Marge Lansing.

"And I!" said Hilaire viciously.

Immediately Ethan Howard regretted his folly. They'd be antagonistic to the newcomer now, and she was a stranger. The fact fretted his sense of hospitality. He liked his guests to be at ease and happy under his roof.

Well—he dismissed the matter. Too late to remedy his mistake! And women were always antagonistic to each other, always competitors. Doubtless the unknown Mrs. Steele could take care of herself.

THE interval which elapsed between Mrs. Steele's arrival and her appearance upon the scene was strangely silent and curiously packed with anticipation. It



"Our host, Mr. Howard," said Park, presenting her. Howard bowed over Mrs. Steele's hand, which was small and fragile, but unexpectedly firm in his grasp.

was almost, Ethan Howard thought later, as though she laid a preliminary spell upon all of them, or as though Fate had paused upon some extraordinarily important moment of destiny.

Park came in first, a tall, distinguished man whose temples were slightly touched with gray.

"Thought you ought to meet Mrs. Steele, Howard," he greeted pleasantly. "By a peculiar coincidence she lives in your building. She tells me, however, that she is leaving soon."

"A—widow?" hazarded Howard, wrinkling his brow in an effort to recall any one who might bear a fancied resemblance to his mental picture of the unknown Mrs. Steele.

"A widow," confirmed Park. "A widow for the past year."

Simultaneously Mrs. Steele came in, and Ethan Howard rose to his feet in one upward surge. Afterward he could not determine whether it was his sense of hospitality or the shock of his first sight of Mrs. Steele which brought him to his feet so precipitately.

She was dressed very simply in black, without any ornamentation in the way of trimmings or jewelry. Her skin, warmly white, was without a touch of color. Involuntarily Ethan Howard thought of fragrant magnolia bloom, of orange blossoms, of new milk, of anything richly, warmly white.

Her hair was of a vivid darkness, as opposed to dull black, and was drawn back quite plainly into a soft knot at the base of a perfectly formed head. Only a very beautiful woman would dare so trying a style, he realized instantly.

Upon the whiteness of her face, her mouth was a splash of alluring rose-color. Artificial? He didn't know. Provocative, at any rate.

He had a sudden and intense desire to know the color of her eyes. Black, no doubt, with that coloring.

"Our host, Mr. Howard," said Park, presenting her.

He bowed over Mrs. Steele's hand, which was small and fragile, but unexpectedly firm in his grasp. Her eyes, to his great disappointment, remained downcast.

As he regarded Mrs. Steele with deepening interest, his phrase of the earlier part of the evening returned to him.

Infinite possibilities.

"It seems strange we haven't met, living in the same building," murmured Mrs. Steele.

He liked her voice, liked her placid statement of a fact, made without sentimental reproach of destiny.

Marge Lansing stirred suddenly, recalling him to his duties as host.

He presented Mrs. Steele to Marge and Hilaire, and to Salisbury Jones, waiting eagerly at his elbow.

Salisbury Jones had an eye for a beautiful woman. His very apparent interest decided the fact of Mrs. Steele's beauty, if indeed Ethan Howard longer had any doubt.

Taka appeared in the doorway with a tray full of cocktails.

Mrs. Steele, Ethan Howard perceived, barely tasted hers. Her restraint appealed to him. He was, he told himself, more or less weary of masculine women and feminine men.

Presently, rearranging his dinner party so as to place Mrs. Steele opposite himself, he ushered his guests into the dining-room.

MRS. STEELE had not yet raised her eyes. Astonishing, the intensityof his desire to see them. What did he expect to learn? Did the eye really reveal the inner workings of thes oul? Scientists contended that the expression of the eye itself did not actually change.

He seated Mrs. Steele across from him at the narrow table. With so small a party he did not occupy the aloof seat at the head of the table usually reserved for the host. Marge suspected his move, and a bitterness momentarily crossed her face. But she smiled at him, and he smiled back. Marge, he told himself, not for the first time, was a good sport.

Mrs. Steele used a strange, exotic perfume, curiously stimulating. A contrast there, between her perfume and her exceedingly plain dress.

He was tantalized by his inability to read her. Usually women were easy to classify, but Mrs. Steele presented an enigma. If she would only raise her eyes!

She did not, however, do so. Instead, she kept her eyes down, talking very little. A sphinx of a woman, he told himself exasperatedly. Was she really indifferent, or was it a pose?

Accustomed to women who maneuvered for his favor, he was piqued in his vanity. Rather sullenly he told himself that he was not interested in Mrs. Steele, and turned deliberately to Hilaire, on his left.

HILAIRE played up to him, smiled into his eyes, leaned toward him with her lovely shoulders—and all the time his thoughts remained obstinately fixed upon Mrs. Steele.

It was, he told himself, exceedingly bad manners for any guest to remain so silent. But Mrs. Steele disregarded that. She ate, with an evident appreciation of the quality of the food served her, her eyes upon her plate. Shyness? No, the assurance of her entrance into a room full of strangers precluded that. Indifferent? A hot tide of anger rushed through Ethan Howard.

Course succeeded course. The dinner, as he had foreseen, was perfect.

"Taka," complimented Hilaire, with the familiarity of a frequent guest, "I'll get *fat*, if I come here often."

"You *do* have to be careful!" sympathized Marge sweetly.

Hilaire reddened with offense. It was true. A certain fulness about her chin and upper arms threatened to betray her into the ranks of the forced-to-reduce.

Mrs. Steele, Ethan Howard perceived, need not fear on that score. Her figure was very slender, although well rounded. Covertly he compared her with the others. Not thin, slender.

She was aware of his scrutiny, but not restless beneath it. Again indifferent.

Ethan Howard raged. What quality had this woman which so aroused his curiosity? Quality! He paused, struck by the word. Perhaps just that: sheer quality.

With all her silence and her aloofness, she dominated the other two women. They felt it, were resenting it.

And her indifference was not exactly coldness. There was, instead, an impression of vivid, eager aliveness about her.

Vivid—yes, that was it!

Unexpectedly Ethan Howard wondered whether to kiss Mrs. Steele's soft red mouth, would also mean nothing to him.

A kiss could mean anything—a kiss could mean nothing at all!

A humming set in, in his temples. It was foolish to encourage such thoughts, but weren't men always considering women in the light of what each woman could mean emotionally? What other reason had men for interest in women, aside from the coldly impersonal appreciation awarded any creation of beauty?

Well, he told himself savagely, his feeling with regard to Mrs. Steele was decidedly not coldly impersonal. An exasperated curiosity, that expressed it more exactly. If she would only lift her eyes! That riddle solved, he might perhaps return to sanity.

Irritably he perceived that both of the other men were also keenly aware of Mrs. Steele. And Mrs. Steele, as far as he could see, was keenly aware of none of them.

A black-clad figure with exquisite shoulders, unadorned by even so much as a string of beads, she was dominating the whole situation.

Helplessly he watched the play of her hands in the conventional motions of eating. No waste motion, a curious sureness of direction and grasp, dimpled white hands with beautifully cared-for nails . . . His gaze remained upon them, fascinated.

Perfection in every detail—and he loved perfection.

In spite of himself he had a momentary picture of Mrs. Steele in the chair before the dressing table in his guest room, bending back to his embrace.

Was that what he wanted? He didn't know, he told himself uncertainly; couldn't know until he saw her eyes.

What a curious, exasperating habit in a woman, to keep her eyes perpetually hidden! It was an almost arrogant gesture toward the outer world, almost as though she withheld herself.

Something never quite possessed—a sharp disturbance quickened in him. Imagination, he decided, could be an entirely destructive force.

"Taka—champagne!" he commanded abruptly.

"I get, Mist' Howard," nodded Taka.

"O perfect host!" approved Marge Lansing joyously.

Mrs. Steele smiled faintly. Did she read in his sudden gay spirits a determination to show off? Ethan Howard reddened.

Taka served the golden bubbling drink. A gaiety invaded his guests, with the exception of Mrs. Steele. She drank moderately, showing no outward reaction to her emptied glass; her failure to respond was in some curious way a reflection upon his hospitality.

Ethan Howard grew inwardly peevish.

"O perfect host!" said Marge Lansing again.

He unbent to her praise, held out his glass to her, drank her health. Marge Lansing preened herself, her glance crossing that of Hilaire with an effect of drawn steel.

THROUGH it all Mrs. Steele sat silent and withdrawn, the curve of her long eyelashes sharp against the warm whiteness of her cheek.

A snow-woman, he told himself despairingly, a creature formed of ice! And knew in his innermost heart that he lied in thinking it. Instinct told him that below the cool exterior lay the near presence of flame. If his own instinct were at fault, then what of those other men, each eagerly intent upon Mrs. Steele beneath the laughing chaff they were gaily bandying with Hilaire and Marge Lansing?

Mrs. Steele: what was her other name? And what her station in life? She must have a history of some sort. A woman like that hadn't been simply born, reared, and eventually married.

The sort of woman for whom empires were built, crimes committed, great deeds accomplished . . . Ethan Howard experienced an immense curiosity regarding her dead husband. Had he appreciated the sheer quality of her? Had possession of this woman stirred him to fevered endeavors with which to win her approval? Had the dead man had any desire to lay the world at her feet with a single gesture?

Her name: the name by which she would be called by an intimate? He tried fitting names to her aloof personality, silently neglecting his guests.

Marge Lansing guessed the cause of his abstraction. Her gaze went from his face to that of Mrs. Steele, returning with an evident sense of frustration.

Was Mrs. Steele herself aware of the fact that the attention of every one in the room centered upon her? Even the room itself, with its black and white floor, its crimson draperies, repeated her tones of black and white and red.

She had spoken only once or twice during the meal, in answer to direct questions. Her voice was full and rich. Bell-like, it seemed to rest upon the air perceptibly when she had finished speaking. A singer, perhaps? The rounded chest and throat development seemed to hint at it.

Was she aware of her own failure to contribute to the amusement of the gathering? Did she deem her mere ornamental presence at his dinner table sufficient in the way of a return upon his hospitality, or was it only that she was always silent? Something about that silence of hers spoke more loudly than sound. Peace: that was the promise her silence held forth.

He visioned himself returning from a hard day at the office, exhausted, to find her waiting for him, immediately engulfing him in her own repose.

Repose: he caught at the word. It was so exactly what nearly everybody lacked nowadays. Restlessness predominated in every one, but Mrs. Steele *had* no restlessness: only a vast repose of manner more alluring than anything he had ever seen before. It soothed, it healed, it promised infinite possibilities.

Infinite possibilities!

A cluster of stars burst rocket-wise in his brain. Infinite possibilities . . . the thing upon which to base a lasting fidelity in a world which had all but disregarded fidelity in its perpetual desire for something new. And yet, to be unfaithful was to fail! He could, in that moment of expanded vision, have wept at the pity of it.

Was the champagne heating his brain unduly, sending its golden sparkle dancing through him?

He decided that he was stirred by a drug more potent. No champagne, no drink he had ever tasted, had incited in him the madness aroused by this black and white figure at his board.

The dinner came to an end. Taka brought in a great basket of hothouse fruits for those not caring for a conventional mousse.

PRESENTLY his women guests withdrew to the drawing-room, preceded by Taka with a coffee service upon a silver tray.

Foolish, this custom of the women departing to give the men an opportunity to smoke, when in the other room the women themselves would be smoking.

Did Mrs. Steele smoke? It was curious

how his speculations invariably returned to her!

Salisbury Jones moved closer to Leroy Park.

"Tell us about Mrs. Steele, old man. She's superb!"

An adequate choice of words, thought Ethan Howard, lighting a very black cigar, rich with oil. This particular blend he imported from Cuba, where it was made up for him specially. Curling smoke floated into the air, and he sighed with satisfaction. One of the real moments of life was furnished by a good after-dinner cigar!

An expansiveness set in. He seconded Salisbury Jones's urgent request.

"Yes, Park, tell us about her."

Leroy Park extended his own cigar to the match Taka was holding ready, puffed reflectively.

"Good smoke, Howard—but you always have the best of everything! The best food, the best clothes, the best service—" He broke off tantalizingly. "And in Mrs. Steele I've brought you the finest type of woman: brains, beauty and charm."

Again he paused.

"I know," said Ethan Howard impatiently. "But who is she?"

"For at least two years she has been living under your own roof—I *should* say her apartment is under the same roof as your own." Again he paused, with a hint of seriousness in his manner. "She is, however, leaving here shortly."

"But who is she?" implored Salisbury Jones. "You're getting nowhere."

Park spread his hands in a gesture of futility.

"What more do you wish to know?" he inquired dryly. "The obvious facts are plain: She is young, beautiful, possessed of rare charm, a widow! I was her husband's attorney. I managed his affairs. I have managed hers since his death. But you are, I imagine, not expecting me to violate the confidence reposed in me professionally?"

"Certainly not!" protested Ethan Howard and Salisbury Jones in unison.

Both, however, were obviously disappointed. Nothing in the information vouchsafed gave any real line on Mrs. Steele.

"Who was she before her marriage?" asked Ethan Howard abruptly.

"Henry Steele's stenographer," explained Leroy Park. "Steele himself was a broker in the Street. You may have known him."

"I did, very slightly," murmured Ethan Howard.

He had known Steele! He had missed the opportunity of knowing Mrs. Steele a dozen times, no doubt; had perhaps even missed the opportunity of knowing her while she was yet unmarried.

"Were they married long? She seems young."

"Several years, I believe. Steele died a year ago. Nearly twenty years older than Mrs. Steele, I think he was. Mrs. Steele is in her early thirties."

At last Park was giving them real information.

In her thirties! It seemed impossible. Mrs. Steele had that blend of youth and maturity which appealed so inevitably to a man's imagination. A husband twenty years older than herself: she had not, then, made a love match, in all probability.

A poor girl, working for her living: no doubt she'd tired of that. He held no resentment against Mrs. Steele for marrying to escape toil. Women married for various motives, more or less honestly admitted. And beauty was short-lived: Mrs. Steele was intelligent; she would have known that.

Those long eyelashes, sharp against her cheek as she looked downward: had they been as maddening to Henry Steele? Had he been compelled to marry her to solve for himself the tormenting riddle of her personality, urged by his own curiosity?

And had he ever solved it?

AN EXTRAORDINARY jealousy of Henry Steele came to Ethan Howard, quickly subsiding. Likely Henry Steele had never solved the riddle. Perhaps for him there had been no riddle, only an attractive woman. Each individual would draw from Mrs. Steele's infinite possibilities only what his own imaginative need demanded.

What was his, Ethan Howard's need? He struggled with his own uncertainty. Peace, love, passion—which of the three, or all three?

"She is a very remarkable woman," Park was saying.

A slight, inscrutable smile touched his lips.

"She has some remarkable ideas," he added; "ideas not at all compatible with life as it is ordinarily lived, or with the conventional prejudice of a lawyer, but quite remarkable, for all that."

What did Park mean by this?

Ethan Howard discovered a last, tormenting curiosity as he arose.

It leaped forth into words.

"I say, Park—what color *are* her eyes?"

Salisbury Jones stopped short, halfway to the door. Apparently he had his own curiosity in the matter.

Park considered, drawled forth tantalizingly.

"D'you know—I've never known myself!"

They went into the other room.

Mrs. Steele sat beside the coffee service, waiting. The other two women had withdrawn to a carved Italian sofa covered with peach damask.

It was clever of Mrs. Steele to establish herself where she would have a legitimate reason for being, Ethan Howard appreciated, and thus to avoid the appearance of being slighted by the other two women. It was clever of her also to have a reason for establishing immediate contact with the men upon their entrance to the room, although she would hardly have need of that, with her own personal charm and his attention as host to rely upon.

He crossed over to her.

"Coffee?" she inquired lightly. "Or have you been served?"

He accepted the cup from her hand, a china trifle in white and gold. The coffee was a Turkish blend, thick and strong, for which he had a marked preference.

Slowly sipping the warm savor of it, he considered the possibilities of the evening.

"Music?" he suggested tentatively, glancing at Salisbury Jones.

"I sing," said Mrs. Steele, matter-of-factly.

"You can play your accompaniment?"

"Yes."

He led the way to the adjoining music room; seated her; leaned against the end of the piano, waiting. Perhaps she would at last look up.

Her gaze, however, was bent upon the black and white piano keys.

Black and white, with an embroidered Spanish shawl in shades of rose thrown across the piano—the place was meant for her! Ethan Howard himself preferred subdued colors, with an occasional hint of gorgeousness for sharp relief. Mrs. Steele, he recognized, was like that: black and white and the warm splash of her rose-red mouth.

To kiss that sensitive red mouth: would it likewise mean nothing? The tantalizing question came back to him.

Mrs. Steele began to sing, and with the first note his attention was arrested, his imagination stirred.

He had expected a lullaby, a conventional ballad, anything but the thing of passion and abandon she selected. The full rich voice, the feeling of intensity and fire running underneath, brought the others crowding into the room.

She finished; struck a final chord, and abruptly looked full in Ethan Howard's face.

He wavered beneath the sudden impact of that deliberate look. Her eyes were not dark, after all: a clear, warm gray. His surprise startled him. He was glad that the chorus of exclamations from the others covered his momentary speechlessness.

"Marvelous!" said Marge Lansing lightly, far too wise to give scant praise.

"Almost—*professional!*" chimed Hilaire maliciously.

SALISBURY JONES added his meed of praise. Park said nothing; no doubt he had heard her sing before. They were all waiting for him now.

"Please—sing again," he said, very low.

But Mrs. Steele arose, turning away from the piano decisively.

"A stranger should not be permitted to monopolize the evening!" she refused.

Wise, exceedingly wise! Wise in her statement, wise in creating a demand and then leaving it unsatisfied.

Again he considered the possibilities of the evening.

"There are six of us—not enough for two tables of bridge. We might play Mah Jong, or we might try poker."

"Mah Jong!" said Marge Lansing instantly.

"Poker!" declared Hilaire.

He hesitated in whimsical uncertainty.

"Suppose you cast the deciding vote, Mrs. Steele."

"I haven't learned Mah Jong."

"That settles it," he declared in relief.

The Chinese game bored him; he much preferred poker himself.

Quickly he motioned to Taka, hovering in the background.

"The poker table, Taka. Sandwiches at twelve. And I shall need the closed car later."

To himself he sighed with vexation. He would have to take Hilaire home, listen to her prattle, be delayed an hour while she exerted herself to charm. And what he wanted most was to be alone with his thoughts.

Taka arranged the table, stacked red, white, blue and yellow chips expertly, informed them with a silent gesture that the table was in readiness, and withdrew.

Ethan Howard seated his guests, again choosing a seat directly opposite Mrs. Steele. She might, during the course of the evening, look full into his eyes again. He was extraordinarily anxious to repeat the experience.

Marge Lansing played a hard game, overlooking no advantage; Hilaire, an indifferently good game, expostulating pettishly over her losses. Mrs. Steele played a conservative game which failed to applaud her gains and equally failed to deplore her losses. As he watched her play, it came to Ethan Howard that women seldom played that sort of game—at least, the sort of women he knew.

It was his belief that he could size up his friends better in a poker game than under any other conditions. Anything into which money entered as a stake served to strip away the thin veneer of courtesy and good manners from all but thoroughbreds.

Hilaire's greed was showing perceptibly already. Marge Lansing's determination to win was only a little less evident. Mrs. Steele played with well-bred indifference to the outcome. Queer, how women's greed was invariably more perceptible than that of men!

Salisbury Jones now: money mattered to him. But except for an occasional flash of disappointment, he concealed his feelings well. Not so, Hilaire! She complained fretfully of her luck, although she knew it was his custom to pay the losses of his women guests from his own pocket, and to permit them to carry away their winnings.

Mrs. Steele, however, could not know of his invariable custom of paying the losses unless Park had told her, and this was most unlikely. His thoughts swung sharply back to her.

She was losing slightly, but was apparently still indifferent. The explanation of this lay perhaps in the fact that she was so far removed from the need of money that her indifference was actual. And yet the wealthiest among his acquaintances were frequently the keenest on winning!

Hilaire and Marge Lansing, of course, could not afford to be really indifferent. Marge Lansing's bills were long unpaid. He knew this from the gossip which spread through her intimate circle. And Hilaire's alimony was less than she was accustomed to. She disconcertingly informed the world of this fact on every possible occasion.

HILAIRE was a discreet grafter: he'd bought hats and stockings and occasionally gifts of expensive jewelry for her. Hilaire frankly preferred useful presents to perishable flowers or candy; had told him so early in their acquaintance.

"You've so much—I've so little!" she had sighed, her blond head very close to his shoulder. "Why shouldn't you give me things, if it makes you happy to do so?"

Whether it made him happy or not, he had given her many things. Hilaire's thanks were charming and most grateful. Hilaire was a pretty woman. It was far from unpleasant to receive her perfumed kisses, which were nevertheless entirely empty of emotion, and to hold the position of her most intimate friend.

Smiling at himself, Ethan Howard wondered how many intimate friends pretty Hilaire had! He could marry her tomorrow, if he wished; could, if he were discreet and minded to make the price high enough, have her without marriage. Hilaire was not possessed of enough virtue to get in her own way. Two trips to Reno had lightened her of that!

His gaze shifted to Marge Lansing. Marge played the game of life differently. She had never married, although she had had, according to her own admission, one serious love affair.

She'd told him about it across a tea table at the Ritz. He remembered the tone of her voice, the slightly drawn expression of her face.

"I don't know why I tell you this—except that I'm going to try as hard as anything to marry you, and I'd rather you'd know. Seems squarer, somehow!" She'd smiled faintly. "At any rate, I want you to know I've had a try at this love business."

Her black eyes had been soft beneath a film of tears. He had sensed the quickening of her heart with remembered emotion. She went on rather slowly.

"He'd nothing, the man I loved, wouldn't have for years. *I'd* nothing but my expensive tastes, and I knew I wouldn't, perhaps couldn't, change. So there we were, with nothing but our love for each other, and not enough courage to take the chance of winning through with just that, although the love was real."

Somehow he'd been filled with a curious sympathy for her in the long pause which followed, probably because she so obviously suffered in remembering. Marge's lover had died in the war, and she had drearily conceded that perhaps it was best.

"We wouldn't have married anyhow," she finished. "We were too wise for that. Love—our kind of love—doesn't last under the kind of conditions we'd have had to meet."

Watching Marge triumphantly produce a winning hand, he remembered the suddenly changed expression of her eyes, like stars, her whole manner brightened by a radiance.

"I'll never be sorry I cared," she had declared wistfully, "although it seems to me he had the easier end of it! Easier to die by far than to live on, when you've once had something like that in your life, and then lost it."

He'd known what she meant: it was hard for dwellers on Olympian heights to come down to everyday living again. All that came after was anticlimax.

Marge raked in her winnings triumphantly. He watched her, reflecting that life was indeed a queer business. Two people, both utterly selfish, yet managing to create a relation so entirely beautiful that Marge Lansing's hard eyes must always fill with tears at the memory of it!

He liked Marge Lansing's honesty. Liked her better because she had once held in herself this capacity for emotion. A pity that it could not have flowered under favoring circumstances! His knowledge of her, however, coincided with her own reasoning. They wouldn't have been happy, yoked together in an unpromising marriage, the dream soon tarnished by drab reality. They had lacked, those two lovers, the capacity for struggle which means eventual victory.

His thoughts returned to their inevitable magnet, Mrs. Steele, as he picked up the hand just dealt him. With a slight flash of excitement, he counted four aces.

Mrs. Steele apparently held good cards also. A quiver of surprise rippled across her own face and disappeared, leaving the customary immobility. A good poker face, despite that slight betraying ripple of agitation.

He raised the ante when it came his turn. She raised again. He reraised. After a crossfire lasting several moments, the other players dropped out.

"Fight it out, you two!" granted Salisbury Jones humorously.

ETHAN HOWARD drew one card. Mrs. Steele drew none. She bet first, without hesitation. He raised. She raised the bet again. The crossfire began once more. When would she weaken? He found, with surprise, that the situation apparently affected his nerves first. After all, why bet against his own money? Mrs. Steele didn't know, but if she lost, he paid. An impulse of impatience came to him. He would end this farce.

Mrs. Steele raised again. Nerve there, all right! He hesitated, abruptly decided; threw his hand on top of the discard, face down.

"My intuition tells me you have the winning hand!" he acknowledged smilingly.

Mrs. Steele threw him a direct look from her extraordinary eyes—not gray; violet! Confound it, what color *were* they? He could understand Park's hesitation in the matter now. He could have sworn also that a fleeting disappointment lay in her eyes. She didn't care to win by default.

"It isn't poker," she admitted lightly. "But I'll be generous and tell you that I held four kings."

Expectantly she waited.

"Four kings is a winning hand," he evaded.

Marge Lansing gathered up the cards. Expertly fingering through them as she prepared to shuffle, she glanced at his hand. She knew! He saw the disapproving tightness of her mouth.

Well, he assured himself defensively, if he paid the losses, what difference could it make? Really none! That was the unpleasant feature about playing a man's game with women. You couldn't treat them as men, and that spoiled the game.

The evening progressed. At midnight Taka came in with sandwiches and drinks in tall, frosted glasses, cool with lemon and orange juice. The glasses, iridescent and fragile as bubbles, had been blown in Venice. He'd brought them from there, superintending their packing himself.

The players settled their score. Mrs. Steele had lost. He refused the roll of bills she extended, produced from some mysterious hiding-place.

"I always pay the losses of my women guests," he explained.

"But that makes it—not a game!" demurred Mrs. Steele.

His own feeling! His respect for Mrs. Steele grew.

What an extraordinary thing to have for a woman: *respect!* Men gave women love, admiration, passionate desire, but seldom respect. Not, at any rate, in his class.

"It is my custom," he returned inflexibly.

Mrs. Steele's head went up with a touch of haughtiness. "But I'd not have played, if I'd known."

Sporting of her, at any rate, but her attitude was offensive to the other two women. Hilaire's eyes were darting fire. She'd lost heavily, had played a reckless game knowing he would settle. If he accepted Mrs. Steele's money, to save her own face Hilaire would be compelled to pay her losses. She realized this, was waiting in icy silence. It amused him to prolong her suspense.

Marge Lansing had won. She interfered good-naturedly.

"It is Mr. Howard's preference, Mrs. Steele, and he is our host."

Mrs. Steele gave way with good grace. The bills disappeared as mysteriously as they had appeared.

"I thank you."

Her manner, however, was cold. It was still more coldly disapproving when, a glass and a sandwich in his hands, he found himself with her, a little apart from the others.

"Don't be angry!" he begged. "Some of the women who play here cannot afford to lose."

"Then they shouldn't play! One can't play a game only with the expectation of winning. A game without hazard is uninteresting. It ceases to be a game then!"

Mrs. Steele's defiant manner startled him, it had been so long since any woman had definitely opposed his wishes or his opinions. She was not playing up to him at any rate. His respect for her increased. But why should she bother to play up to him? To a widow, independently situated, probably wealthy, what had he to offer?

He found the question discouraging. He even wished at that moment that Mrs. Steele were poor, that his wealth might prove an attraction; and was immediately ashamed of his unworthy wish. Wasn't it, as she had said, the hazard of anything which made it interesting?

Salisbury Jones and Hilaire were dancing to a new record. Park and Marge Lansing were quite frankly embracing in the music room. Park was a distinguished lawyer, of good family, and had considerable wealth aside from his practice. He had spoken truly in promising Marge an escort wealthier than himself. Immediately he recognized that Park would naturally be escorting Mrs. Steele home, and Marge would have to depend upon Salisbury Jones. Marge would be disappointed.

SMILING, he planned a rearrangement of the party which would please everybody but Hilaire. Nothing simpler than to offer to take Mrs. Steele home himself, as they lived in the same building. Park undoubtedly had his car with him, and could take Marge home. And he would send Hilaire, with Salisbury Jones, in his own car. Smiling again, he visioned Hilaire's silent inner fury and her outward affable acceptance of the change. It would be amusing to outwit her and to gratify his own wish at the same time. . . .

The blare of the noisy dance music offended him. He wanted quiet, Mrs. Steele's kind of quiet. Inhospitably he wished that his guests would leave.

"Seems futile—the kind of things we spend our lives doing," he remarked moodily to Mrs. Steele, gesturing toward the two other couples.

"Perhaps it wouldn't seem so futile if you were giving it up."

Had he imagined a note of desperation in her voice? Uneasily he recalled Park's information about her going away soon. Was there a possible connection between that fact and the faint touch of desperation in her tone? He gave it up. Widows of men able to live in this apartment building were invariably well provided for. Anyhow, she'd stayed on after her husband's death. What more conclusive fact would any one want?

"You're leaving here soon?" he inquired bluntly.

"Next week."

"Not going far, I hope! I should hate to terminate an altogether pleasant acquaintance."

Her eyes met his with a gleam of irony.

"We've been practically next door for two years." Her fan pointed to the ceiling. "Only a floor separated us. I live just above!"

Just above—her very home laid out on the identical plan of his own! Perhaps the room which was his largest guest room was hers above. She might, just above his head, have been sitting at her dressing-table during all his imaginings of the early evening. So thinly may a man be separated from the romance of his desire. . . .

Marge Lansing came from the music room. Her eyes were brilliant, her cheeks flushed. Park followed.

Marge appealed to him silently.

"I'm going now, Ethan."

"Park," said Ethan Howard, "you've your car? Please take Miss Lansing home, and I'll take care of Mrs. Steele—she lives just above, you know. Hilaire, I'll send you and Salisbury home in my car."

"Right!" muttered Hilaire sulkily.

She was furious. Undoubtedly it would cost him something handsome in the way of a gift to restore himself to her good graces. Did he care?

Indifferently he decided that he didn't. But he had disappointed Hilaire, had embarrassed her in front of Marge Lansing, so he owed her something. Smiling, he thought of a fur cloak he had seen that day on the Avenue. He would send Hilaire the cloak. Its price meant nothing to him, and Hilaire would be delighted—that is, if she would accept it. But she would, he decided instantly. Yes, Hilaire would accept the cloak, and likely the moon as well, if he offered it to her in a satin box.

HIS guests disappeared for their wraps, reappearing shortly. Hilaire had on the white cloak again. He wondered who had given her that. Perhaps her last husband. It might, he agreed whimsically, have been honestly acquired.

Marge Lansing had on her gold tissue wrap, and her eyes were bright above its dark fur collar. Mrs. Steele was wrapped in a quaint effect of black and white Chinese embroidery. It should, he told himself, have a touch of scarlet somewhere to redeem its somberness, although its oriental atmosphere suited her.

Black and white—that was mourning, he remembered abruptly.

And mourning meant that a woman grieved.

Ethan Howard smiled. Mrs. Steele did not mourn. There was nothing of grief about her whatsoever. She—*waited.* A queer, brooding quality of anticipation clung to her. Waited—yes, that was the word. Unfulfilled destiny was her keynote.

He sent the others down in one elevator, and stepped into another with Mrs. Steele, ascending to the next floor. She stood close to him, her exotic perfume rising sharply in his nostrils.

There it was again, the challenging contrast between her perfume and her somber clothes.

Outside her apartment, he took the key she extended to him, opening the door.

"I've let my personal maid go, as I am leaving next week," she explained; "and the other servants have gone to bed."

"Then I'd better come in a moment to make sure you are all right."

She preceded him up the main hall to a room where a single dull gold lamp burned. He passed on the way the room which corresponded to the larger guest room of his own apartment. His guest had been correct. It was Mrs. Steele's bedroom. The bed was turned back, the rose-shaded bed lamp was lit, a film of rosy negligée lay waiting in readiness. Also, stronger proof, a gust of the exotic perfume greeted him through that open door.

Mrs. Steele laid aside her wrap with a touch of weariness.

"May I offer you something?"

"Nothing, thanks. It's late."

"It's late," admitted Mrs. Steele, again with the slight, disarming weariness which made her more accessible.

She held out one hand rather limply.

"Good night," she smiled.

"I'll let myself out," he offered, and was surprised at the reluctance with which he left her.

Afterward it came to him that his interest had entirely centered upon Mrs. Steele and he had not once glanced at the furnishings of the room in which he left her, although ordinarily he was keenly aware of his surroundings.

And he had neglected to express a wish to see her again, although his determination to do so was invincibly formed.

Taka he sent to bed at once, preferring to be alone. For the moment, he was far too intensely stimulated to feel sleepy. A mounting exhilaration claimed him.

Instead of going to bed, he slipped on a dressing-gown and went into the guest room, still faintly fragrant with the perfume of his guests. Even as he switched on the shaded side lights, he distinguished Mrs. Steele's exotic perfume above the rest.

Sinking into a green satin chair embroidered in rose and blue and gold, he thought back over the events of the evening.

Once he thought he heard a faint footfall above.

Again he imagined Mrs. Steele at the apple-green dressing-table; saw her lean back into his arms.

Only then did he realize that he was in love with her. As suddenly as that! Like any schoolboy!

Immediately he told himself that it was *not* sudden. He had been waiting a long, long time for Mrs. Steele to appear and claim her place in his life.

The apparent suddenness had to do with her long awaited appearance, and not with his instant falling in love.

ETHAN HOWARD awoke the next morning with a vivid sense of expectancy.

Apparently the mere fact of Mrs. Steele's existence, separated from him by a single flooring, had power to confer a radiance upon his day.

Taka was drawing his bath in the adjoining room. His business suit and its accessories were already laid out. His dress clothes of the previous evening had disappeared. Sunlight was pouring in through the windows, where the shades were already raised.

He swung his feet over the edge of the bed, aware of a sensation of combined fatigue and exhilaration.

The lateness of his retiring hour accounted for one, his awareness of Mrs. Steele accounted for the other.

Was she awake—perhaps having her breakfast in bed? Women did that, he knew vaguely. The picture of Mrs. Steele reclining against dainty pillows, a delicate silk spread across her knees, a coffee cup in her slender hand, enchanted him.

Pleasant to go in and greet her, to see her extraordinary eyes lift to his in welcome, to sit for a few moments in idle conversation before departing for the office.

He lingered on the picture with a growing wistfulness. His life was empty, empty! As empty as— He stood, frowning with the effort to identify a symbol of loneliness approximating his.

"Your bath?" suggested Taka, breaking in on his thoughts.

Taka was smiling, as always. This smiling cheerfulness was a thing he particularly liked about the capable yellow man. Together with his deft ways it made him invaluable. The smile alone was worth his monthly salary, it was so heartening to contemplate.

Ethan Howard decided that Taka was entitled to another raise, and busied himself briefly with speculation on whether Taka's cheerfulness was assumed or natural. However, it didn't really matter; the effect, to the casual beholder, was the same.

Shrugging into his dressing-gown, he went into the adjoining bathroom, which had been specially installed for him. Of extra size, it rivaled the baths of ancient Rome in splendor, with its blaze of black and white onyx, glass and enamel.

Taka shaved him and withdrew. He bathed, finishing with a cold shower, needle-sharp. Gasping with shock, he felt renewed vitality vanquish his sense of fatigue.

Later, dressed in conventional blue with a narrow white line, pink-skinned and glowing, he breakfasted from a tray in the library, where he found the morning papers awaiting him.

The dining-room subtly depressed him when he was alone. He had invariably a sense of being swallowed up in its size. Settling into his chair and unfolding his newspaper, he reflected that the dining-room had been planned for dinner parties, or for large families.

Large families! He halted on the phrase, a vista opening before him to which he had never given thought before. Children held no appeal for Ethan Howard. He felt oddly at a loss with them, so far removed from their interests that there was, for him at least, no bridge to cross the gap.

Would he have felt that way about his own children?

He allowed his coffee to cool while he considered the question.

HIS own children: did the secret lack of his life lie in just those few words? This success he was painstakingly building up: wasn't it rather futile if he was not also building up flesh and bone of his own to carry it forward?

His own children!

He had not wanted them, had not *not* wanted them. He had simply not been driven by the urge for paternity which is in some men a clean white flame. And yet, he had qualities of leadership, of indomitable endurance, which should be transmitted. Or *could* a man be sure of transmitting his best?

Involuntarily he thought of the weak, dissipated sons of strong men of his acquaintance.

One could, he decided regretfully, be sure of nothing in this world. Although there must be definite rules which, exactly fulfilled, would produce definite results.

A son of his own, for instance: he visioned that son, full-grown, possessed of the same ruthless power, the same shock of unruly blond hair, the same jutting jaw. To develop in that son the qualities he respected in himself, the same conditions must be brought to bear. That was it! Not a life of ease—struggle was needed to produce men. Ease bred weakness; struggle bred strength. Simple, when you understood. Life, polishing and grinding away at individuality, its grinding eventually disclosing the hidden jewel, that did the trick.

His thoughts switched to Mrs. Steele.

She'd known struggle in her early days, must have, if she'd worked for her daily bread. Regrettable, that! Struggle wasn't for women. It hardened them. Or was it for women, after all?

He frowned over the question, discovering simultaneously that his coffee was cold.

Taka came immediately in response to his brief tinkle of the bell and bore it away, bringing instead a thermos jug of hot coffee and a fresh cup and saucer.

Probably Taka was surprised at his neglect of his breakfast. Usually he plunged into his morning meal with eager appetite. Food, in common with the other good things of life, appealed to Ethan Howard enormously.

He had often reflected that to achieve his capacity for enjoyment it was inevitably necessary to have had his preliminary background of deprivation. Appreciation necessarily depended on contrast.

Contrast: again he thought of Mrs. Steele.

Mrs. Steele understood the law of contrast so perfectly, expressed it so subtly in her quietness of dress, her startling black and white color, her aloofness, and her exotic perfume. Yes, Mrs. Steele understood contrast. The blankness of her expression, for instance, her eyes discreetly lowered, and then, suddenly, the shock of her direct gaze. A good showman, Mrs. Steele! Instinct, or acquired art?

As in the case of Taka's cheerfulness, he decided that it didn't matter.

Gulping down his coffee, he bundled up his papers, inquiring about his car.

The car, Taka told him, was duly waiting below.

The day outside was unusually warm and sunny for November. This much he could perceive in the sunlight falling through the windows. A day in Indian summer: his mind hung upon the phrase. Perhaps it was what had happened to him; he had inadvertently happened upon the Indian summer of his life. Again he visioned a son of his, full-grown, and with a sharp regret he realized that he would just about live to see that son grown. So many years wasted.

And yet, he told himself stubbornly, taking his hat and overcoat from Taka, he had been only waiting. Had Mrs. Steele appeared on the scene sooner . . . Why must life be so filled with frustration? Or did Destiny realize his needs more exactly than he did himself?

Business had entirely engrossed him up to now. Perhaps only now was he really ready for Mrs. Steele and her probable effect upon his life.

Impatiently he reminded himself that he was planning like any fool in love. Mrs. Steele might refuse him! With the conclusion he realized that he had definitely decided to marry her if it proved possible. Mrs. Steele might refuse him, but his own decision was made. Her effect upon his life was permanent.

GOING downstairs in the elevator, he was not at all surprised to see Mrs. Steele. The fact of her presence fitted in harmoniously with the change in his life. Two years beneath the same roof, and to the best of his knowledge, he had never encountered her. Yet here she was, going down in the same elevator, and the circumstance seemed entirely natural, predestined even. He had meant to see her today, and here she was.

Instantly he realized the source of his pleasure in the bright sunny day. He had, without being exactly aware of it, made up his mind to see her at the first possible moment. She was leaving shortly; he must use the intervening time to best advantage. The bright sunny day had conspired in his behalf.

Mrs. Steele walked out of the entrance into the sunshine by his side. She was, she informed him smilingly, going for a walk. She walked every morning, and today it was entirely too lovely to remain within.

Ethan Howard agreed with her; conceived a distaste for his new car, awaiting him at the curb. The gleam of fawn-colored enamel repelled him, and he experienced an equal impatience with the necessity of putting in an appearance at the office. He wanted instead to stroll in the sunlight with Mrs. Steele.

She wore, this morning, a short coat of crinkly black fur with a collar on which her pointed white chin reposed demurely, a short dark skirt, dull black pumps on slim feet, and a small round hat with a daring feather.

There was no touch of color about her except her vivid mouth, and yet she pleased him utterly. He could not at once determine the source of the distinction which was so indubitably a part of her appearance.

"If you don't mind, I'll walk down the Drive with you," he suggested.

Mrs. Steele smiled. "I was hoping you'd say just that," she assured cordially.

"One moment, please."

Briefly he stepped over to the car and instructed the waiting chauffeur to proceed down the Drive and park some twenty blocks below.

"That is your car?" asked Mrs. Steele, when he rejoined her.

"Yes," he confirmed, as they started down the Drive together.

A tiny sigh escaped Mrs. Steele.

Envy? An involuntary wish to possess? Was it possible that Mrs. Steele was poor?

At the thought, he experienced a passionate wish to tell her immediately that everything he had was at her disposal. He repressed the wish with difficulty. It was not the time, and certainly not the place for an avowal!

They walked on down the street sedately. Occasionally Mrs. Steele made some apt comment on passing people, or something which momentarily intrigued her interest.

A charming companion! She possessed a quick, alert mind, intensely responsive to outward suggestion, and had something of his own appreciation of the color and warmth of the passing tide of life.

Amusedly he watched the quickness of other men's reactions to her charm; their involuntary following glances. Her power to attract pleased him immensely.

It was quite warm. Some of the benches in the strip of park paralleling the walk were occupied by people determined to enjoy to the uttermost what might well be the last breath of outdoor weather. Soon would come inevitable snow and sleet.

Across the river, the Palisades were bare and brown, the red and gold of October quite gone. The water of the river itself was a leaden gray, despite the blue sky overhead. Before long the crossing and recrossing ferryboats would be nosing their way through chunks of ice.

After an incredibly brief interval, they reached his car again.

"Now I must go back!" laughed Mrs. Steele, turning away.

Thirty? Impossible! With her warm white skin, faintly colored by exercise, and her eager joyousness, she might have been twenty.

Ethan Howard detained her with an urgent hand.

"Please—an odd request, Mrs. Steele! If you'll drive down as far as my office with me, I'll send you back in the car."

He could, of course, have sent her back and hailed a taxi, but he was incredibly reluctant to sacrifice a moment of her companionship. His need of Mrs. Steele was rising momentarily.

MRS. STEELE smiled, yielded. He assisted her into the car, followed, and sat by her side.

She leaned back, slender, aloof, her eyes studying the passing flow of traffic.

"This," she said suddenly, patting the fawn-colored upholstery with a caressing hand, "is *luxury*."

Ethan Howard smiled at her emphasis.

"Your own car is perhaps finer."

Mrs. Steele withdrew. Not that she moved on the cushion beside him, but all that was actually Mrs. Steele drew a long way off.

"I've sold my cars," she explained. "As I have already told you, I am going away soon."

"Far?" He leaned toward her.

"Very far!" said Mrs. Steele, after a brief, all but imperceptible hesitation.

A sharp pain of impending loss tore at Ethan Howard.

He must not allow it, must not let her get away. Why, sitting here by his side, she might almost be his wife, driving him to his office before going on to her shopping. She was so close, and soon, according to her own expressed intention, she would be far away.

He wanted his wife!

The silence between them became electric with his desire. The car slid to a halt. The chauffeur was bowing at the door. The entrance to his office yawned a few feet away.

And still he hesitated, his hesitation delaying a car just behind, waiting to draw up in turn. A horn honked imperatively, but he disregarded it. He was imploring, he who had always demanded.

"I must see you again today!"

Mrs. Steele smiled at him. He had a direct glance from her eyes.

"Suppose I give you tea at five o'clock."

It became immediately the acme of his desire, the objective upon which all his day would be concentrated.

Tea with Mrs. Steele: the two of them alone for an intimate hour!

He thanked her quietly, got out, and turned to bend low over her hand.

"The car is at your service. And you may expect me at five."

As he passed into the entrance, ascending to his office, it was the one definite fact of his day which held any meaning: he would see Mrs. Steele at five o'clock.

Williams, his confidential secretary, met him with a face pale and drawn with calamity.

Ethan Howard experienced a sensation of annoyance that Williams should be perturbed on a day which should rightfully hold nothing but joyous experience. Williams was breaking his hard and fast rule of having none but cheerful people around him.

"My God, sir! Where have you been?" blurted Williams. "I tried the house; you were gone. Then I tried every place I could think of."

"Well," inquired Ethan Howard, with a ring of impatience in his tone, "now that I'm here, what is it?"

Williams swallowed hard.

"It's N. & W., sir—there's a run on it. The stock is dropping fast, with plenty being offered."

This was serious, Ethan Howard acknowledged to himself. Not only serious, but inconvenient in view of his intense interest in Mrs. Steele. He had wanted to submerge himself in that, to concentrate all his will upon the winning of Mrs. Steele, and it would now be impossible. Williams's information meant that he had a fight on his hands, and the two interests would war against each other.

His jaw thrust out more perceptibly. He had an instant, intolerable anger against the unidentified enemies who were spoiling his day. Then, with a tiny shock, he realized that the hidden group seeking to ruin him were not even enemies. Their action was not personal, was merely directed against him for the sake of impersonal gain. His ruin meant their gain.

It was, he admitted honestly, by exactly such tactics he had won his own wealth and position. A ruthless operator himself, he could not criticize his unguessed adversaries. *It was the game!*

Ordinarily he loved it, loved the sense of fierce combat, of fighting in the dark, of pitting his own wits against those of unseen others. Struggle exhilarated him, and he had welcomed it as an integral part of his life. Now, for the first time, the necessity of struggle fretted him, conflicting sharply with his preoccupation with Mrs. Steele.

The news was particularly disconcerting just at this time when he was tied up in N. & W. beyond the point of caution. His holdings there were unwise, and unwisdom was a trap which had never closed upon him before. He had been too keen-witted, too aware of the pitfalls of the Street. He had not, as he put it to himself, been in the habit of carrying all his eggs in one basket. Therein lay safety. But this once, caught by an exceptional opportunity of profit, he had put aside his inflexible rule, with the result that somebody had known.

STANDING there watching Williams's convulsed face, he wondered if Williams had betrayed him. Probably not. It took courage to betray a master, and Williams had the soul of a rabbit. Rabbit souls, out of sheer cowardice, were apt to be inclined in the direction of loyalty. It took a stronger soul than Williams's to be capable of treachery.

There had been a leak somewhere, but he dismissed the details of it from his speculations. The fact was all that really mattered. His carefully covered buying operations had been discovered, and in the one moment of his weakness, his enemies had thrust at him.

Enemies: his punctilious mind again refused the word—his competitors!

"You have instructed my various brokers to buy?"

"Of course, sir. It was the one thing to do."

Williams was right there. It was the one thing to do. All those unknown others engaged in an attempt to force N. & W. down; himself alone, with his personal resources, striving to hold it up to a level representing safety for himself! How many were banded against him? And what was the extent of their resources?

Crossing the floor of the outer office, he caught up the ribbon tape of a market ticker, examining it carefully as the tape flowed slowly through his fingers. He glanced then at his watch.

Eleven o'clock. With every succeeding moment he would know more regarding the resources massed against him. There was nothing to do but wait.

"Have you telephoned my banks for statements?"

His question rang out sharply as he released the tape. His expression was forbidding.

"I have already done so, sir."

"List all my resources and bring me the figures," he instructed, passing on through to his private office.

The grim expression of his face tightened until it seemed worn into the underlying structure of bone. He seemed at once older, fiercer, and far more predatory. He had now, aside from any personal consideration, his mounting desire for Mrs. Steele to consider. Passion may be a ruthless force. It was, in Ethan Howard at this moment, an overmastering determination to conquer his adversaries. They threatened all that counted most in his life at this moment.

Time wore slowly by. At intervals he consulted the tape in his private office. Occasionally he heard the hum of voices outside his door. Williams was permitting nobody to reach him today.

Williams came in once with a sheaf of statements, carefully compiled. Williams was nervous; probably the entire office force was nervous; wryly Ethan Howard admitted that he was nervous himself.

What a fool, what a colossal fool he had been to go in so heavily on N. & W.! He'd had money enough for anything. Why had he taken the risk?

Immediately he recognized that it was probably because of the identical factor of risk that he had become involved. A life without risk became eventually impossible to a man of his temperament. Security had not for him the appeal it held for the more timid.

N. & W. advanced, broke for a short period, advanced again, supported by his dollars, slowly fed into it. Somewhere frenzied brokers were selling N. & W., and equally frenzied brokers were buying, and all the while the real seat of the struggle was in this quiet room, and in another less quiet room where a group of men watched the ticker.

At eleven-thirty, he called Park on the telephone, after sitting for minutes staring at a broad shaft of sunlight streaming through the window beside him.

PARK'S voice came back almost instantly, querulous with the interruption.

"Well?"

"It's Howard. There's something I want to know," he said into the receiver. "What is Mrs. Steele's other name?"

He caught the pause of incredulous amazement which silenced Park, and then Park's laugh.

"Good Lord, Howard! Did you call me at this hour on a busy day just to ask me that? You must be hard hit!"

"I am," returned Howard. "And it's by way of being a rather busy day for me also."

Something in his tone brought forth the information instantly.

"Her name," said Park, "is Margaret. And now, if you can curb your desire for further information regarding Mrs. Steele, I'll return to the exceedingly important case which is at present in need of my attention."

Howard replaced his receiver without further words.

Margaret! He could have smiled at the absurdity of the name for such an exotic personality. And yet, wasn't it subtly right? Again the power of contrast!

Margaret!

He said it to himself, and there was music in the very saying.

Aware of his foolishness, he tried the whole name.

Margaret Steele!

And then, after a long interval, he tried it with his own name.

Margaret Howard.

The mere sound of the two words brought a tightness to his throat. He felt the loneliness surrounding him at the same time expanding and dissolving. What power lay in a name, when it was the name of a man's beloved!

He did not go out for luncheon; felt, indeed, no urge of appetite.

At one-thirty, Hilaire telephoned, connected to his private wire by a disconcerted Williams. Likely Williams himself had not gone to lunch, with his daily bread and butter hanging in the balance.

"I *thought*," said Hilaire's charming, undoubtedly aggrieved voice, "that you would at least call up and apologize. You've treated me very shabbily, you know."

Her grievance was so remote, so infinitesimal beside the calamity threatening him that he had to strain his memory to recall his offense. Oh, yes! He'd sent Hilaire home with the impecunious Salisbury Jones instead of giving her the opportunity of trying her blandishments upon his more wealthy self. And having treated her shabbily, he must pay in full by treating her handsomely. Clever Hilaire, to suggest so subtly the remedy for his fault along with the offense!

He smiled, momentarily distracted from his problem, and experienced a sense of gratitude to Hilaire for the brief relaxation. He would give Hilaire the fur cloak. If he broke beneath the machinations of his adversaries, it would be a final gesture of royal extravagance.

"I'm sending you a wonderful cloak I saw on the Avenue yesterday as a sort of amends, Hilaire," he said, a laugh in his voice. "If you drive by, you can see it yourself." He mentioned the name of the shop. "There was but one cloak in the window."

Hilare was both astonished and delighted. Such extravagance to her would stand in the light of a preliminary declaration, he realized. Only upon a wife or a mistress would a man lavish such extravagance, according to Hilaire's reasoning. Yes, undoubtedly Hilaire was excited.

Aware of his own passion for Mrs. Steele, he smiled again. Perhaps he was being unnecessarily unkind to Hilaire in rousing her hopes? But no, Hilaire would have the cloak. Yes, she'd have that!

Hilaire's voice mounted in a crescendo of excited thanks. She had a weakness for fine furs, the curious weakness which in some women inclines to furs rather than to jewels. Hilaire loved to huddle her delicate body in soft fur, finding in the act the peak of luxury. There was something barbaric about her preference. Without a too great stretch of imagination he could vision Hilaire decked in skins and beads.

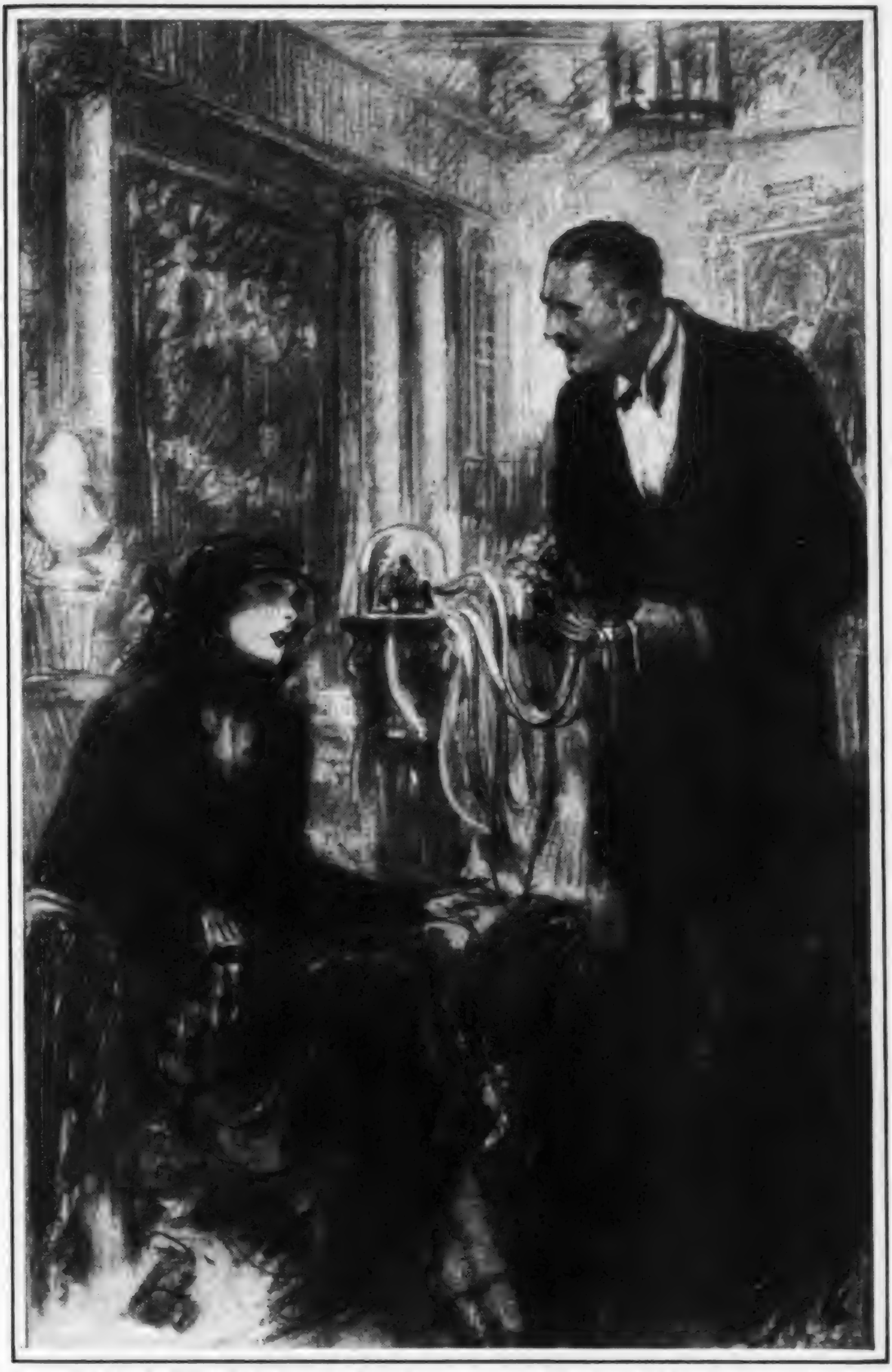
A silence. He waited amusedly.

"Are you there, Ethan?"

"I'm still here," he assured.

A hesitation, almost of shyness.

"I know you think I'm a rotten little



Briefly he outlined the events of the day. "It's possible I'll not be able to give you all you expect, Margaret. It's your privilege to choose."

grafter," said Hilaire. "And I suppose I *am*. But, Ethan, I've always wanted some things so badly that I couldn't get for myself any other way!"

"You're a very charming grafter at any rate," he reassured. "And isn't that all we expect of women: to be charming?"

Replacing the receiver, he realized that his words contained a fundamental truth. It was, for the most part, all men expected of women, and perhaps, in its last significance, it represented the reason why women contributed so little in the way of lasting emotion to their lovers.

He was unexpectedly stirred by Hilaire's slightly husky honesty. It was unlike her, just as it had been unlike Marge Lansing to bare her heart, with its secret load of sorrow, to him. What quality in himself compelled this strange honesty from the women with whom he came in contact? Nothing he did, or said, at any rate!

AN HOUR later, Marge came, thrusting herself in upon him with a laugh at the sight of his surprised face.

"Your secretary did his best to stop me," she said. "But I told him you were expecting me. I even"— she smiled delightedly—"told him that we were to be married."

Ethan Howard stared resentfully at her audacity.

He could vision the scene: Williams, protesting, aware of the seriousness of the situation for himself, and anxious to spare him intrusion while he was presumably thinking out some mighty plan to preserve his fortune from collapse; Marge, gay, domineering, unscrupulous in attaining her end—her final victory over Williams's rabbit-like soul.

"If you don't want me to stay?" Marge's self-possession wavered before her lack of welcome. Her audacity had, this time at least, perhaps carried her too far.

"Stay!" encouraged Ethan Howard, his mood changing.

She might as well, now that she was here. After all, he wasn't working out a plan. All the part of his imagination which was not occupied with Mrs. Steele had gone numb.

Marge Lansing seated herself, her gay air of triumph once more in the ascendant.

"I think I'm going to land Park," she told him bluntly. "He likes my daring, and my sophistication does not offend him. Having me will be adding a bit of caviar to his dull existence."

She was quite right, decided Ethan Howard amusedly. She and Park would hit it off amazingly well, each having what the other lacked.

Marge's defiant manner softened.

"I'm really quite pleased about it," she admitted. "You see—it hasn't been entirely pleasant, knowing that I haven't lived up to the family expectations. I was trained for a triumphant finish in the matrimonial sweepstakes, and I failed, somehow, to step off with the right foot. I've been made to feel it!"

True enough, reflected Ethan Howard, considering the matter and feeling an unexpected sympathy for Marge. A girl was such a helpless creature, after all. Nothing much was open to a girl of Marge's qualifications except marriage, and as she said, she'd failed to qualify appropriately. Doubtless they *had* made her feel it, her grim, walrus-mustached father, and the henna-haired mother of definite social aspirations.

Embarrassment touched Marge. She played with the swagger stick she held loosely in her hand. As always, she was exquisitely dressed. Her dark blue, fur-trimmed dress was perfectly cut, her feet trimly shod, her gloves wrinkled in long, loose folds over her slim wrists. Her fair face, delicately powdered and rouged, was younger in expression than usual. For a moment he caught the soft, unsteady quiver of her mouth.

"I wanted you to know first," said Marge, stammering, "because, you see—" She came to an embarrassed halt, finding it impossible even for her bold self to continue.

He understood instantly. She could not quite bring herself to beg him to marry her.

Then she did care about him, enough at any rate to prefer him to Park, who was richer. Perhaps a great deal richer by the time this day was over, he remembered ruefully.

The silence prolonged itself. Two tears ran down Marge's cheeks, and this unexpected softening where he had thought her entirely hard, touched him. He had a wish to comfort her, to break the silence, and could think of no words. He couldn't tell her abruptly that he loved Mrs. Steele.

But Marge, with her woman's intuition, guessed it.

"There's somebody else, isn't there, Ethan?"

He inclined his head.

"Mrs. Steele," said Marge thoughtfully. "I felt her drawing you last night. She knew also, Ethan. She's clever—far more clever than any of us. Cleverer even than you think she is."

She waited.

"It's Mrs. Steele," acknowledged Ethan Howard, feeling that he owed Marge this information after her plainly shown preference for himself. "I suppose it sounds absurd to you, on such short acquaintance?"

Marge shook her head. "Not to me!" she denied. "You forget, Ethan, that I've been in love. Sometimes it hits that way: along comes somebody with two eyes and two hands and two feet just like anybody else, and ping! a bell rings somewhere in your heart."

She got up and came over to him, holding his coat lapels with her two slender hands, an unexpected sweetness in her dark eyes.

"If it's love, Ethan, grab it!" she advised gallantly. "Don't miss it—it's the one big thing in life. *I know!*"

She released him immediately, turning toward the door.

"So I'll be Mrs. Park before long," she said brightly, "with a town house, and a country house, and a garage full of cars, and a husband, and perhaps—" She stopped, wrung by memory into a faint outcry of distress. "Oh, Ethan! Life can be so long! And I'm only twenty-five."

Ethan Howard came over and took her into his arms, holding out the one crumb of comfort he had to offer.

"You'll love your children, Marge. It's the one merciful provision of sex."

Marge flung up her head, two crystal tears cascading down her cheeks.

"There's *that!*" she acknowledged.

WHEN she had gone, Ethan Howard realized that it was after three and the market had closed. Looking at the tape, he found that he had survived the day. Tomorrow was another day, but today at least he had weathered through.

Glancing down the tape with elation, he reflected that the situation, while desperate, was not entirely lost. His adversaries had counted on the initial shock to win, and he'd survived. N. & W. showed a slight rise just before the market closed; the end was not yet in sight.

Somberly replacing the tape, he considered the probable events of the morrow. Somehow, he must conquer.

Ringing a buzzer, he instructed Williams to find out if his car had arrived.

"It is on the way, sir," advised Williams. "The chauffeur telephoned a few minutes ago."

Ethan Howard took up his hat and coat. Jules would circle the block patiently until he appeared in the entrance; a natural consideration for his employees prompted him to wait downstairs. Moreover, he was suddenly and imperatively anxious to be on his way to Mrs. Steele.

He stopped, on the way up the Avenue, to order the cloak sent to Hilaire, writing a check for it with a wry grimace. A costly gesture of extravagance, this. He hoped Hilaire would be duly appreciative.

A lady, said the saleswoman, had been in to view the cloak. She had been much pleased; had said that her husband would be in later to complete the purchase.

Her husband?

Ethan Howard's lips twitched in a smile of amusement. How like Hilaire to cover over what was entirely unconventional with a glib pretense of convention!

Unmoved, he gave the address, saw the saleswoman's involuntary comparison of Hilaire's name with the name on his check, and saw an added touch of sophistication creep into her manner. He knew what she was thinking. Well, she was wrong in this instance. Usually, however, her surmise would be correct. Few men of his acquaintance were needlessly generous.

He stopped again, a few moments later at a florist's, to select flowers for Mrs. Steele, lingering long over his selection.

After prolonged consideration, he decided on an armful of fresh white roses, touched with a faint pink at the center. The roses irresistibly reminded him of Mrs. Steele and her warm pallor. Once more he thought of everything warmly white he could summon to mind: magnolia bloom, white roses, ivory velvet . . .

Later, driving past a famous jewelry shop, he was minded to stop and purchase a string of pearls. The sheen of milk-white pearls on her slender throat . . . He fought away his own madness. Impossible for him to arrive at her door laden with gifts of jewelry like some caliph of Bagdad seeking to dazzle a houri! It must be repressed, this insane desire to heap all the gifts of the world at Mrs. Steele's feet.

Mrs. Steele, said the maidservant who answered his ring, was expecting him. He handed her his coat and hat, and walked down the hall to the room where he had left her the night before.

This room, he perceived at once, was tastefully furnished, but Mrs. Steele herself had somehow the air of being more in accord with his own place. The circumstance pleased him. No doubt these furnishings represented her husband's taste.

Once again the phantom jealousy spread through Ethan Howard, even as he bent over Mrs. Steele's hand.

Mrs. Steele sat behind a tea-table daintily equipped. Eggshell cups, a silver tea service—he admired the picture she made.

She was not wearing black, but something made of layer upon layer of filmy white material, with, somewhere far beneath, something which threw a faint rosy glow upward through all the enveloping layers of sheer white.

Her hair was in the familiar soft plain knot, softly waving away from a demure parting. She looked very young and, after Marge Lansing's smart hardness, very appealing. It was impossible to realize that Marge was her junior in years.

SHE poured a cup of tea for him with a pretty gesture of hand and wrist. What lovely hands—and how sure in their motion

He refused a choice of tempting sandwiches or small cakes, and sipped at the amber contents of his cup in utter content. He was where he wanted to be; he was with the one person he wanted to be with; he was, in spite of his hard day, entirely at peace. Tea he did not ordinarily care for, feeling, like most big men, foolish with an absurdly fragile cup between his huge fingers.

His hands: he caught Mrs. Steele's gaze upon them. Did she think they were ugly? In view of her dainty hands, they were.

Smiling, he extended his hands toward her, indicating the splayed finger-tips and the old, faintly red scars.

"Once, long ago, I worked for my daily bread with my hands. Now I no longer do so, but the scars remain."

An inscrutable something invaded Mrs. Steele's gaze, almost a warmness.

"Tell me!" she murmured.

In a few brief sentences he sketched his upward climb, wondering, as he finished, if tomorrow would begin his decline.

Darkness invaded the room. Mrs. Steele switched on a lamp above her head. It brought out warm tawny tints in the blackness of her hair, and cast a spurious glow of rose upon her white, white face.

His emotion increased momentarily.

In his heart he prayed that there might not be any interruption of this perfect hour. It was entirely possible, of course, that there would be. Even probable! Other men must enjoy an equal privilege of intimacy. So charming a woman could hardly have failed to establish various masculine contacts. With a redness of sheer rage he visioned Mrs. Steele receiving and returning casual kisses after the manner of Hilaire or Marge Lansing, and recoiled, weak and spent, from the picture created by his imagination.

Yet Mrs. Steele was human, he admitted. There must have been in her a need of affection, however casual. Forcibly he thrust the thought out of mind. Mrs. Steele was cool, aloof, withdrawn. He thanked God for these characteristics. And yet, that hint of fire beneath a cool surface, so intriguing in its suggestions . . .

"Do you know," Mrs. Steele's quizzical voice interrupted his turbid thoughts, "that you've been silent all of fifteen minutes? What are you thinking of? And don't you want me to take your cup?"

He flushed, stammered like a schoolboy. How awkward a man in love could be!

Rising, he crossed to the table, put down his cup carefully, passed behind Mrs. Steele in returning to his chair. And abruptly paused, caught in the web of his own desire.

Below him was Mrs. Steele's head, slightly lowered to some detail of the tea-table. The down-bent head, the pose of her arms, smote him with a sense of shock.

In that moment he saw in Mrs. Steele the eternal Madonna.

Strange fancy! He had never imagined either Marge or Hilaire bending down to a tiny child, and yet the picture in his mind was startlingly vivid. Some quality about Mrs. Steele must be responsible for the illusion. Her gentleness, perhaps, or perhaps only the effect gained from her flowing dress of white, and the simple arrangement of her hair, so like that of pictured madonnas.

Her eyes, looking across the head of a child into his . . .

Ethan Howard put his two hands lightly, almost timidly, upon her slight shoulders, feeling their smooth warmth strike upward through the sheer fabric into his palms.

"Margaret," he stammered in an anguish of longing, "*Margaret!*"

MRS. STEELE raised her head as the woman in the window had done, and leaned back against him. Her hands came up and clasped his own. He saw the hurried rise and fall of her breast, and perceived that her calm was invaded by a ripple of agitation not unlike that of a twilight pool into which a stone is cast. Seeing her response to his own emotion, he felt a singing gladness mount in him.

Bending, he kissed her, experiencing a dizzy shock of rapture, and realizing that all the years of his life had been just so much preparation for this moment.

"You'll marry me soon?" he asked presently, going back to his chair.

She was, he saw with a vast, possessive tenderness, immensely disturbed and shaken. Even the invariable whiteness of her face was disturbed with color. Her manner was almost pleading.

"But this is *love* you are offering me!" she gasped.

"What else?" he agreed.

His own calm was shattered, his hands were twitching.

Mrs. Steele gazed at him in a curious uncertainty. Involuntarily he opened his cigarette case in an attempt to regain his self-possession.

"What did you expect?" he inquired then, somewhat at a loss.

One of her slim, agitated hands sought the delicate laces over her breast.

"The desire of a man for a woman he hopes to make his own. For *that* I could pay in beauty." She flung up her dark head in a striking pose of sheer pride. "I've beauty enough to create the great illusion for a man!"

Ethan Howard made a gesture of protest.

"Need it be an illusion?" he implored.

She softened, with the repentant softness of a woman who had been unjustly unkind. Her hand dropped to her lap. She leaned back, her face in the shadow of the lamp. A silence followed.

"I suppose you are thinking that I am entirely mad?" he hazarded finally.

"I was thinking about my own part in this affair," she said simply.

Again the silence. Mrs. Steele sighed, moved restlessly.

"I thought I could marry you without your knowing," she said, "But I see that I cannot go through with it, not without telling you the truth at least: *I planned to marry you!*"

He laughed, aware of a buoyant relief.

"Then we're equally guilty. I planned to marry *you*, the first moment I saw you."

"But I," protested Mrs. Steele heavily, "planned to marry you before I saw you—for what you had. That's ugly!"

A cold depression settled upon Ethan Howard immediately. Once more it was the possessions and not the man that counted!

"You must have had a reason?"

"I was—quite desperate."

Her blue-gray eyes were luminous in the shadow and, he fancied, appealing in expression.

"Desperate?" he repeated.

"If you'll let me tell you, please, in my own way?"

Ethan Howard nodded.

"I was Mr. Steele's stenographer."

Again he nodded.

"Two years ago, when I was thirty, I married him. My early life had been sordid, like yours. I hungered perpetually for things out of my reach."

Well—didn't he know that hunger? He listened attentively to what followed.

"I DIDN'T want the life that other girls wanted," said Mrs. Steele dully. "Or perhaps I knew what I wanted, and they didn't. So many girls are trapped by their emotions. I wouldn't let myself be!"

Ethan Howard thought back to Olga,

in the days of his youth, remembering the pitfall of emotion which had yawned beneath his own feet. He hadn't let himself be trapped!

"All around me I saw people trapped into blind alleys by their own lack of foresight. I made up my mind I wouldn't be like that." She made a slight gesture of rejecting something with her two slender hands.

"I could have married several times—I suppose any girl can." Again she made the brief gesture of rejecting something. "But I wouldn't marry. Then my youth began to go by, and I couldn't see that I had bettered myself by refusing to accept the common lot. My youth . . . Perhaps you cannot understand the terror of departing youth for a woman, when all her hope of happiness depends on it?"

She appealed to him with a glance, and again Ethan Howard silently nodded. He did understand. Once more he had the feeling that life was cruel to women in establishing their claim to recognition upon the utterly impermanent basis of beauty.

"So, when I was thirty, I was glad to marry Mr. Steele. To me he seemed a door of escape from the dullness of my life; but I found, as I suppose many people do, that I had only extended the background of my dullness. And in making this marriage I had robbed my life of anticipation. I had everything which would be mine, you see; there was nothing left to hope for!"

A PANG shot through Ethan Howard. He saw in her situation a pathos akin to his own before he had discovered his yet unrealized dream.

Mrs. Steele was continuing. "A year ago, Mr. Steele died. He left, when his assets were totaled up, something less than fifteen thousand dollars. I could, of course, have retired to some small town, a widow with a pittance, and dragged out the rest of my life without hope." Her bosom rose and fell, in a magnificent refutation of this drear existence.

"But I chose to risk everything on the chance of marrying again. My one real asset was myself. I'd enough to last a year, selling my cars, and some of my jewelry. It was a long shot, but sometimes a long shot wins."

She stood up restlessly, confronting Ethan Howard.

"Mr. Park advised against my plan, and yet it is the forlorn hopes which make history. When he saw that my mind was made up, he helped."

Impotently she wrung her hands.

"I could have married several times. The art of fascination can be learned—*anything* can be learned by a desperate woman! Perhaps it wasn't an honest success I achieved, but it was success. At least, it was success until it came to the final step: another loveless marriage. I couldn't take that step; it seemed too great a price to pay for security."

Woman's need of security, thought Ethan Howard.

"I was, you see, betrayed by my own romantic weakness," said Mrs. Steele pitifully. "To be a real success at anything, one must be ruthless. And I couldn't quite be ruthless to myself!"

"You couldn't," said Ethan Howard steadily, "marry any of those others, but you are going to marry me. It is because you are going to marry me that you are telling me these things."

Recklessly he was telling himself that none of these things mattered in the least. What mattered the source of her need of him? Hadn't he his own need of escape from the loneliness and the sense of futility threatening him?

Mrs. Steele came over to him, stood directly in front of him, looking up into his face. For the first time he saw the brightness of her eyes dimmed with tears.

"You mean that you still want to marry me?"

There was a hopefulness in her manner, a joyousness somewhere just below her tears.

Ethan Howard voiced what he recognized as a profound truth.

"My dear, I love you!" he said slowly. "And love isn't determined by the worthiness of its object."

Mrs. Steele regained something of her manner of pride.

"I've been honest with you—I needn't have told."

He conceded the truth of this, wondering again what quality in himself produced this strange honesty in women. Hilaire, Marge, and now Mrs. Steele.

She was apparently following his own thought, trying to explain her action to herself.

"There's something about you that conquers," she said. "Something which brings forth the truth at any cost!"

With that, she stepped closer, and he took her in his arms.

Impossible for him to realize all at once that he stood here with Mrs. Steele actually in his arms, her perfume enveloping him like a perceptible cloud. He kissed her again, to confer upon himself the desired sense of reality, and again he had the brief, unfamiliar rapture of contact.

A kiss could mean nothing, a kiss could mean everything! Passion could be intensely personal, or intensely impersonal. His own passion was personal. Only Mrs. Steele could satisfy it.

At that moment, despite her recent disclosures, he wanted to establish empires, to conquer worlds, to create destinies, all because of his love for Mrs. Steele. And two days ago there had been no Mrs. Steele!

THEY had arranged that he was to return for her in an hour, and that it was to be a gala evening. Ordinarily Ethan Howard had no liking for public restaurants, but tonight he had an impulse to flaunt his happiness in the eyes of a probably disinterested world in a futile gesture of possession which was strangely urgent.

Upstairs, he immediately confided his incredible news to Taka.

"I'm to be married soon, Taka."

Taka congratulated him without surprise.

"I think so, last night," he said, smiling.

"The deuce you did!"

Ethan Howard was annoyed by Taka's perspicacity, but after a moment he conceded that it was not strange. The man had served him for years; probably Taka had recognized that he was falling in love before he was aware of it himself.

Taka's explanation, however, differed from this.

"You ready marry long time, Mist' Howard," he said.

An uneasy dissatisfaction came to Ethan Howard. Was this feeling he had for Margaret born only of his inner urge for companionship, or was it something Margaret herself inspired? And could Margaret possibly be as wonderful as he thought her? Could *any* woman be?

Then, summoning his will power, he shrugged aside as unfair his critical expectation of her.

Hilaire rang up, just as he was leaving, her voice excited and eager.

"The cloak came, Ethan, and it's gorgeous! Take me out somewhere for dinner, so I can wear it."

But that was impossible, he told her bluntly; and he heard the ring of disappointment creep into her voice.

"Later?" she urged.

Hilaire wanted to clinch matters, to make him declare himself. He sensed the purpose in her persistence.

"Impossible!" he refused. "I've an engagement."

"I don't care *how* late," persisted Hilaire desperately.

Her persistence annoyed him. He might as well end it. "I'd like you to be the first to know of my engagement to Mrs. Steele, Hilaire," he said smoothly.

Hilaire gasped audibly.

"But, Ethan—why, you've only just met!"

"Sometimes the intensity of an emotion is not determined by the length of an acquaintance," he defended.

A long pause, and presently he knew that Hilaire had hung up without another word. Well, Hilaire had the cloak, and her emotions, whether of disappointment or triumph, were never lasting.

He went up to Margaret aquiver with eager expectation, hoping she would not wear black tonight. Something with no aspect of mourning would fit the occasion better. What was it she had said as he left her?

"I want to be beautiful tonight, Ethan. I only wish I could be the most beautiful woman in the world for you!"

"To me, you are!" he had responded gallantly.

Margaret had on her wrap, and he was unable to see her dress. Only her hair, dressed high and finished off with a jeweled comb, and her silver slippers, fastened with jeweled buckles, were visible above and below her cloak of dark, rich fur.

She looked more exotic than he had ever seen her, Spanish almost, with her black and white coloring and her high headdress. The now familiar perfume floated from her in a cloud as he bent to kiss her.

Another of the moments of sheer rapture

in which he realized thankfully that all the possibilities of life were not exhausted for him, after all, when life could hold moments like this. Love—well, wasn't love the only infinite adventure? He experienced an absurd gratitude to Margaret for making it possible for him to care so much. Men, for the most part, regarded love too casually, he decided at that moment. Or perhaps other men never knew this high, mounting rapture which was his? Perhaps it had sprung from his loneliness, and from his not caring for women in the past. He'd been busy, and now he loved. These represented the two distinguishing, sharply separated phases of his life.

In the car they glanced at each other like happy children granted an unexpected joy.

"I'm happy!" confided Margaret. "You're exactly what I've always wanted, Ethan: some one with whom I could feel safe, and near, and happy."

"And you are what I've always wanted!" he assured her passionately. "Some one who could lift me up out of the humdrum world into a world I've always believed existed, but never before have been able to find."

ALL the way downtown he held her hand in his, smiling to observe how utterly he conformed to the conventional behavior of a lover. There was, he discovered, no novelty to the gestures of love, nor could there be any.. The only aspect of novelty possible to love lay in the fact that it was an ever new experience to lovers.

Lights, music, the color and glow of a prominent hotel at evening time—all fitted into his joyous mood.

The very welcome of the head waiter, who called him by name, and seemed to recognize their relationship in a discreet glance, added to his happiness. He had a moment, following Margaret across the dining-room and noting her ability to create interest by her very passage, when it seemed to him he viewed everything in life from a different perspective.

They sat on opposite sides of a table so narrow that their knees touched at intervals beneath it.

Margaret threw back her cloak, and he gasped. It seemed, with that throwing back of the dark, outer layer of her, that all the room lit up.

She wore a gown of silver cloth, faintly blue in tone, and sewn with brilliants, literally hundreds of them. The cloak behind her was lined with dull Chinese red, forming a background for her splendor.

He saw the fact of her unmistakable beauty radiate through the crowded room, herself unaware of it, and perhaps indifferent, since she must long ago have become accustomed to the effect of her own beauty. An immense pride of possession came to him, transcending every emotion of the sort he had ever known.

Perfect—and his! Life could hold no prouder moment for him. All else must henceforth be anticlimax.

They ate, they talked in low intimate murmurs, they drank to each other, and the little spot where the table stood was more definitely home to Ethan Howard than any place he had ever known. He pitied the emptiness of his previous life, now that he had a measure of comparison.

Once, reaching below the surface of the table, he caught her slim fingers in his. Tomorrow he must get her a ring. It should, he decided instantly, be a ring of rings, worthy of such a woman.

"I love you, Margaret," he said, very low. "And I'm grateful for the privilege of loving you!"

Margaret flushed, grew very serious.

"I hope you'll always be able to love me, Ethan. You know, it's really in my hands whether you do or not. The business of maintaining an already established illusion rests necessarily upon the creator."

"But it's not an illusion," he insisted.

Margaret laughed, and there was a softness in the laugh.

At midnight they left, suddenly weary of the music and the gay, colorful crowd, driving silently up the Avenue; her hand, in its long, loose glove, rested on his knee.

Again she voiced her happiness, in a whisper, as though afraid of challenging unfriendly Fates by too loud an admission of it.

"I'm happy," said Margaret, with an undercurrent of pathos. "And I'd given up hoping to be!"

A sudden terror of the inevitable tomorrow seized Ethan Howard without warning. What would tomorrow mean for him? In the past he had weathered many crises successfully, untroubled by the uncertainty of the outcome. Having fought his way up single-handed, he was confident that he could, if need be, do it again.

But now? Wryly he acknowledged that any man in love has given hostage to fortune. A cold fear mounted in him, his first intimate experience with the chilling emotion. There must be no disaster! He couldn't permit it. There was, from now on, Margaret's need of security to be reckoned with, which laid upon him the imperative need of conquering the conditions that threatened him.

In that moment he saw where the needs of men and women conflicted. For men, the need of adventure; for women, the need of security. Two separate and conflicting needs, which, in love, were necessarily linked together.

Security, security—the wheels of the car clicked around to the measure of it.

Margaret leaned against him wearily.

"I'm tired. Last night I did not sleep."

A triumph for himself was beneath her words. And that sweet dependence of hers, relaxed against his shoulder, an unvoiced plea for protection against the possible advent of calamity . . .

An overpowering tenderness came to him. He tightened his arm around her possessively. For Margaret's sake he must conquer the conditions threatening him; in that moment his need of conquest became almost visible.

His first impulse the next morning was to reach for the telephone at his bedside and call Margaret. Smiling at his own impetuosity, he suppressed the impulse.

TAKA was busy laying out his shaving things in the bathroom. He heard the faint rattle of metal against the surface of the dressing table.

His clothes were ready and waiting for him, but he saw, with a sudden, superstitious lowering of spirits, that the sun was not shining today.

Uneasily he wondered if the refusal of the skies to shine were to prove an omen. Today was to be an epochal day in his history, and involuntarily he wished all attendant circumstances to be favoring.

Yesterday, he concluded, had also been an epochal day in his history. He thought of Margaret, and the moment when, leaning back against him, she had lifted her face to his.

Taking up the telephone, he called the florist with whom he had frequently placed orders for flowers for Hilaire and Marge Lansing.

To Marge he had sent deep, red roses, winy in scent; to Hilaire, violets and, occasionally, orchids. Hilaire herself was not unlike an orchid.

But for Margaret he chose again the white roses, touched with pink at the center, of his original choice.

Springing out of bed, he could have laughed for joy over his own unsuspected power of sentiment. Never before had he visioned himself as any woman's lover, for he had deep in himself a dread of the treacherous depths of emotion which had preserved to him his present whole-heartedness. Only with his first direct glance into Margaret's eyes had he realized his own capacity for love. And now he was as foolish as any schoolboy in love, infected by an identical madness. Sobering, he was aware of his gladness that there could be for him no confusion of memories. Margaret: his whole life was bound around her now. Even his perilous position in the financial world assumed importance only in so far as it threatened Margaret.

Margaret, he knew, was necessarily involved with his uncertain future. And what Margaret wanted was not uncertain. Margaret wanted security. Women, quite rightly perhaps, had no essential sense of adventure; not as a class, at any rate, although it was conceivable that in isolated instances women might possess it. With a sudden, sharp longing, he wished that Margaret had the sense of adventure, and the accompanying sense that security too often meant rust.

The purposes of life were vague, only dimly understood, but at intervals it had seemed to Ethan Howard that he glimpsed briefly an unrolled corner of the Great Plan. He had one of these rare moments now, standing there irresolutely in his pajamas, frowning down at the dull blue carpet of his bedroom. There was, apparently, one great essential about life: need. Without need, and the necessity of conquest which accompanied it, no progress, no growth, no realization of happiness, no— He paused before the illimitable.

Need and its accompanying hungers, which man either fled from or turned to conquer—why, they were simply the spur which drove mankind onward. Once a level was reached where need of anything was no longer possible, what happened? Gradual disintegration!

"You dress?" suggested Taka at that moment.

Ethan Howard recalled himself from the unusual profundity of his own thought.

"I'll dress," he responded briskly.

Once again he went through the motions which comprise a civilized toilet: he was shaved, bathed, showered; he slipped into his immaculate business suit, accepted a fresh handkerchief and his keys from Taka, and smiled to think of the added burden imposed upon man by civilization. Vital minutes of every day, never to be recalled, used in the performance of the daily rite of bath and razor. Prehistoric man had saved those minutes—and for what purpose?

IN THE library, he grasped eagerly at the folded newspapers, fingering them through rapidly to the financial sheets. The erratic movements of N. & W. on the previous day were duly scheduled, together with a brief summing up of the elements probably at work. The identity of the conspirators massed against him was not disclosed, probably was not known, since upon secrecy depended the success of their plans, as nearly all success inevitably depends upon secrecy at some stage of its progress.

Ethan Howard leaned back in his chair ignoring his breakfast, seeking to concentrate all the faculties of his brain on the coming struggle. Today would determine his survival or failure, depending on whether or not his united resources outranked those massed against him. The smaller stockholders of N. & W. could be depended on to help somewhat, but not to any appreciable extent. The outcome would be determined by his own ability to withstand the heavy assault which would begin simultaneously with the opening of the market for the day. The brief rally shortly before closing-time of the previous day meant nothing.

It came to him then that perhaps, in the last analysis, courage would also determine the outcome. Whichever side first experienced panic would weaken. In that circumstance he had one advantage: he stood alone. A single, controlling mind was necessarily more united. His enemies, as a combination, were at the mercy of the weakest and least courageous in their number, if he were correct in his suspicion that a combination had planned his downfall. It took little to create a revolt leading to an eventual stampede among a group banded together for mercenary reasons.

Grimly Ethan Howard smiled, knowing that few men care to risk everything on what may prove to be a forlorn hope. In that knowledge lay the germ of his own success. He had had a penchant for long shots. It was what had given him his ready understanding of Margaret and her desperate plan for survival in her chosen sphere.

Margaret: how she invaded every thought, every situation, and how he loved her! It was as though the stern rock of his existence had suddenly burst into lovely bloom through every crevice. The rock remained, but was entirely overgrown, presenting a new aspect.

Taka came and hovered solicitously in the doorway.

"Mist' Howard not hungry?" he ventured.

Ethan Howard perceived that Taka knew of his difficulties. Very likely Taka had followed his more or less spectacular career during all the years of their association, vicariously satisfying his own sense of adventure. At any rate, his face was genuinely concerned.

"Busy thinking, Taka," he explained tolerantly. "But now I'll eat."

He did so, unwilling to admit by his failure to accomplish breakfast that uneasiness tormented him.

Rising eventually from the small table, he wished again that he might see Margaret before heading into the battle before him, and comforted himself with the thought that soon he would be able to close and begin his day with Margaret.

After they were married, he decided, as he accepted his coat and hat from Taka, he would never be able to let Margaret go away from him. Other couples spent half their lives apart, quite satisfied with the arrangement. Well enough, if it were their choice, but in himself a need of Margaret burned like a flame. He would not be complete without her. Just the sight of her, quiet, aloof, withdrawn, served to satisfy his heart, to make him feel that all was well in his world.

And her capacity for tenderness!

With the memory of her tenderness reaching down to some inner hurt deep in him, he realized the source of his secret dread: if he failed, Margaret probably would not care to marry him. Margaret quite frankly and honestly desired the undeniable advantages of wealth. He could not blame her for that. Margaret and wealth belonged together. Margaret, he decided, was touched with the manner of magnificence.

"All the world's a stage"—Shakespeare had said that, and it was true enough. But the stage must be set properly for each individual performance, or the performance fell flat. Some women were cast for mothers, others . . . Involuntarily he thought of Hilaire. Hilaire had the soul of a wanton, regardless of her position in society. Marge— He hesitated uncertainly; he didn't know just what constituted the proper setting for Marge. But, at any rate, his original thought was true: if the stage were not properly set, the performance would be more or less of a failure. Amusedly he tried to prove his point by imagining the stark tragedy of a desert drama played against a jazz hotel setting. Wouldn't it fall flat?

Passing through the palm-decorated, silk-paneled entrance of the building out under the strip of canopy already installed in expectation of rain, he decided again that Margaret was cast for magnificence.

His car bore him swiftly officeward. Once again he paid tribute of admiration to the sheer beauty of the thing of metal and steel and rich upholstery. The finest in New York, and quite possibly it would not be his much longer. The circumstance contributed subtly to his appreciation of it.

SITTING there upon the thick cushions, he found it impossible to contemplate with any feeling of reality the possible collapse of his fortune. Destiny had never failed him: why should he doubt now?

Williams greeted him with a pallid air of strain. The man's rabbit soul was being wrung with uncertainty. More, from the aspect of things, hung in the balance for Williams than for himself. For Williams, a comfortable living, a congenial occupation, a measure of security rested in the scales. For himself—Ethan Howard winced—all his heart reached out to Margaret.

He went into his private office; locked the door against intrusion; went to the window and stood looking down into the street far below. Many of those hurrying figures knew of the fight looming large on the horizon of the day; some, possibly, were intimately concerned in it. Somewhere near by his enemies were already gathering in anticipation of the final struggle.

Enemies?

He smiled slightly, and then reconsidered. Wasn't anybody an enemy who threatened a man's happiness, regardless of the motive? Enemies: he closed down upon the word decisively, with a certain satisfaction in the decision.

The ticker began its chattering; continued. The small sound began to bore into his brain.

Occasionally he heard again the sound of whispered conversation outside his door, and once Williams's voice sharply protesting, roused to self-assertion by the desperate necessity of the day.

N. & W. was swooping downward again; briefly rallied a few points; began a renewed sharp descent.

Ethan Howard became slowly aware that his temples were damp, the palms of his hands wet, and that the chatter of the ticker was driving him to the point of madness.

Upon impulse, he called Margaret, heard for the first time her soft, clear voice over the telephone.

"My darling!" he said irrepressibly, and immediately steadied himself. "I had to talk to you, to make sure you are real," he explained.

"I'm glad you called me," she reassured. "I wanted to talk to you, but I was afraid of interrupting."

She was, he told her instantly, never to be afraid of interrupting him. "Nothing in all the world could equal your importance in my eyes," he finished, and felt a relief in the exaggerated stress he put into his words.

Margaret wanted to see him in his office, put the request rather timidly, admitting that she had a certain amount of curiosity to see him at work. He agreed to send the car for her later in the day.

That was the end of the conversation. Nothing extraordinary in the words exchanged. The effect alone was extraordinary. He felt stimulated to new resistance, strengthened in some essential way by the sound of her voice. Margaret, although she did not know it, was the stake in a gigantic struggle.

The day wore slowly by, with N. & W. slowly receding and advancing. Once, just before noon, it dropped to a figure where the suspense was maddening; then slowly rallied. His heart throbbed sickeningly during that interval. Let N. & W. once reach a certain point in its decline, and he could not hope for survival. His strength lay in the fact that his enemies could not know what figure marked the certainty of his ultimate defeat.

So distinctly may a mental disturbance be recorded outwardly that Ethan Howard bore a curiously disheveled appearance, though his clothing was in perfect order. Toward the middle of the afternoon, with his eyes and ears strained to the ticker, he began to feel that the struggle in which he was engaged was so agonizing that any end at all was preferable to its continuance.

The ticker throbbed, his heart throbbed, his temples throbbed, all seeming to be equally visited with a weariness which had its initial source in himself.

HILAIRE telephoned in the early afternoon, and he judged that she had had a sharp battle with Williams before being put upon his wire.

"Ethan—" He could have smiled at the weight of sorrow in her tone. How perfectly women like Hilaire simulated emotion they would never feel. "I want to talk to you: I don't think you realize that what you feel for Mrs. Steele is only an infatuation. It will pass!"

He cut in sharply. "To hope that it will pass is the most unkind wish you could possibly make for me, Hilaire."

Hilaire faltered, urged into frankness by her own disappointment.

"I thought—" she said plaintively, and in her voice was the imminent presence of tears.

Ethan Howard smiled wryly; decided that the truth might prove healing to Hilaire's injured feelings.

"Before the day is over, Hilaire, I may be the poorest man in New York."

"You're joking, Ethan!"

"It's not exactly a joke," he affirmed.

Nor was it, with the ticker moment by moment bleeding him white.

"I'm—sorry," murmured Hilaire.

She hung up immediately. Hilaire knew her own limitations, and he discerned a great wisdom on her part in that knowledge. Frail flowers like Hilaire were not meant to blow in the chill breezes of adversity. He absolved her whole-heartedly of quitting a sinking ship with disgraceful celerity. Hilaire was Hilaire; no more, no less.

Taking the morning papers from the pocket of his coat, he ran through them disinterestedly, his attention finally claimed by an item announcing Marge Lansing's engagement to Leroy Park.

He called up. Marge answered the telephone with a new lightness, almost a hopefulness, in her tone.

"I saw the notice," he congratulated.

"Apparently everybody in New York has read it!" laughed Marge. "I didn't know I'd so many friends, but I suppose successful people always have plenty of friends; and I'm that now, you know. Everybody else has called up, but I was waiting to hear from you—"

"I would have called before," he apologized. "But it's by way of being an extraordinarily busy day for me."

"I know! Leroy told me last night." A pause. "Can anybody do anything?"

"Nothing but wish me luck."

"I'm not afraid for you," said Marge surprisingly then. "No matter what comes, Ethan, you'll always be able to fight your way through. One doesn't have to pity *you!*"

He was surprised and touched. "Why, Marge!" he protested. "You're idealizing me!"

"I'm not!" denied Marge vehemently. "I love your courage, Ethan, likely because I've so little of it myself. I hadn't even courage enough to risk myself on the one big thing which ever came to me! I love your courage, Ethan, and I could have loved you. Perhaps, in my way, I did."

"Marge!"

"Leroy won't mind," defended Marge.

"Leroy's getting just the wife he wants, Ethan. I'll fit into his scheme of things. He'll be proud of me. You'll see!"

He had a queer tenderness for her when he hung up. A gallant creature, Marge, in spite of her admission of weakness—perhaps because of it! Nothing was really wrong with Marge, except her stage setting.

At two o'clock, after a sharp decline, N. & W. went flying upward, and he had an immediate intuition that the circumstance was favorable to his interests, that it represented conflict in the ranks of his besiegers. Well he knew the crippling effect of panic in the ranks! Fearing his resources were greater than they had anticipated, his enemies were flying for cover. He had a strange premonition that an end victorious for himself was in sight, and his intuitions usually being correct, he knew a luxury of release in the conviction.

The outcome, however, still was a matter of actual uncertainty, and he decided he must tell Margaret about it when she came.

Meanwhile he could abandon himself to his sudden, hopeful belief that all was to be well with him.

Williams felt it also, came hurrying in with the glad relief of reaction shining in his face.

"I think we've won, sir," he congratulated. "Got them on the run now!"

With an overwhelming surprise Ethan Howard perceived that tears were running down the man's cheeks.

"When you've been fourteen years with one employer, sir!" said Williams emotionally, and suddenly turned and walked out of the office.

A warmness manifested itself in Ethan Howard's breast. Life was full of surprises! Who would have looked for such loyalty in Williams, with his rabbit soul? Who would have troubled to look? With a rising indignation against himself, Ethan Howard told himself that Williams couldn't help being born with a rabbit soul. One couldn't choose.

MARGARET came at four o'clock, all in gray, with several of his roses pinned against her coat.

She thanked him prettily for the flowers.

"All my rooms are full of roses," she said. "And every time I look at them, I think of you, and the roses prove to me that you are real."

His own terror of unreality—how well he recognized her feeling!

Margaret touched her dress, calling his attention to it.

"I'm not wearing mourning any longer, Ethan. I couldn't! It would be hypocrisy," she explained.

"I love you in gray," said Ethan Howard, smiling. "But I suppose I would love you equally in blue or brown or green or anything else I can think of. In anything except black!"

Black reminded him of the other man: that was the reason. Then, genuinely, he pitied the other man. Margaret had not loved that other man! Sharply his egotism recoiled from the hurt of his own thought: Margaret had never admitted love for himself. She had merely accepted him as a prospective husband, and he'd been satisfied with that.

Now he realized that it was not enough. He wanted unendurably to be loved: not for what he had, nor for what he could be, nor for what he was, but simply as himself.

"Margaret!"

The sudden seriousness of his tone frightened her. She moved slightly, catching at the back of a chair to steady herself.

"You didn't mean what you said yesterday?" she said, in a forlorn whisper, voicing her own greatest fear. "You've found out that you don't want to marry me?"

"Not that!" he denied quickly. "Something else has come up."

Walking over to the now silent ticker, he came back with a handful of printed tape. Briefly he outlined to her the events of the day and their significance.

"It's possible I'll not be able to give you all you expect, Margaret, and I thought you ought to know. It's your privilege to choose."

He waited.

Security: what women wanted most in all the world! Again he had the futile wish that Margaret could have some of his own sense of adventure, his own enjoyment of conflict. What a life they could have together!

And then he heard Margaret's voice—painfully, as if from afar, although she was quite close. Stumbling across the room, she had flung herself against his breast with an abandon of which he would not have believed her capable. He had been right in his belief that there was fire behind her aloofness; the flame was burning high now.

"Ethan! Ethan! Does it matter?" she was sobbing. "Can't we build again together? It wasn't so much poverty as the loneliness of poverty I wanted to escape from. And if I was drawn to you in the beginning by my need of what you could give, my need has changed. It's *you* I need now."

She was trying to explain, pleading with him to understand, her eyes, violet-gray, upon his.

"Need—that's it, Ethan! A need of love: everybody has it. However long delayed the hour, however a life may be crowded with other things, there comes a moment when love alone can satisfy the inescapable hunger of the human heart!"

The inescapable hunger of the human heart!

Ethan Howard saw himself looking up at the lighted window in sudden knowledge of his own lack, recognizing in the happiness of two unknown people something he himself did not possess. The inescapable hunger of the human heart for love! Wasn't Margaret right? He'd had everything, and yet he'd had nothing vital until Margaret came.

In everything except love it was the game itself and not the ultimate reward, which counted. Love alone was the infinite adventure in which possession never staled, so long as love remained love.

"I want to marry you now," Margaret was saying, in her new, broken, curiously alive tone, "before we *know* the outcome. It's the only way you'll ever be sure that I do care!"

SHE wanted to marry him today!

Ethan Howard held her away from him briefly, seeing the terror in her eyes as he did so. Margaret was seeing in his act a thrusting of herself out of his life, when he'd become all her hope of happiness. As though that could be!

He smiled, knowing Margaret was no longer aloof and withdrawn. He'd brought her inside the circle of himself. Henceforth they were one, inseparable and indivisible. He choked with the wonder of it.

But because he wanted her to understand, he released her, holding up between them his gnarled, scarred hands.

"I may have to work for you with these," he said quietly.

With one uncontrollable gesture Margaret caught his hands in hers and drew them against her breast. In her gesture was exactly the thing which he had glimpsed in the lighted window, and which had so sharply disturbed all his satisfaction with his life: the same rapture of possession which had taken him by the throat.

An exultation flooded through Ethan Howard. He had conquered; he had triumphed over the limitations imposed by his own success; he had achieved his destiny. Wasn't being loved for one's self alone the triumph of triumphs?

His thought changed. Was this a personal triumph, after all? Wasn't it, rather, the inevitable triumph of love over all other emotions in the world?

No matter! He drew Margaret into his arms gently.

His alone, won by himself alone—the other half of himself, destined for him since the beginning of creation! He had a sense of warm pity for other men, unable to find the self which completed them. Completion, he saw instantly, could never come through one's self: it must always come through another. And completion meant, in a way, a conquest of adverse destiny. So there he was, back again to his old, old longing for conquest.

He opened his mouth to speak to Margaret, saw that she was stricken with emotion, and dropped his cheek, without speaking, to her soft dark hair.

If they went immediately, he was deciding, there would be time to get a license, and they could be married at once. That was what Margaret wanted; it was what he wanted.

Smiling, he realized he had been right in believing this would prove an epochal day: it was his wedding day!

THE END

The Sporting Thing to Do

Deference Has Its Place, in Tennis, in Love and in Business; but the Youngster Who Would Succeed Needs a Moderate Amount of Self-Confidence, Besides

By Lucian Cary

Illustration by Louis G. Schroeder

THERE is a barrier, even in America, between the sons of men who carry a dinner pail and the daughters of men who have had money and power and place for generations. The only question is what, precisely, the barrier is.

Jimmy McLean was the son of a Scotch stone mason who had come to America as a young man, settled in the old Connecticut village of Deep Harbor, and built himself a cottage of the native stone with his own hands. Jimmy learned the difference between good masonry and bad as he grew. At ten he wanted to be a mason like his father; at fifteen he decided to be a contractor and builder besides. But before he was twenty he walked down a lane, in May, between two rows of ancient apple trees, with Cynthia Wainwright. And nothing in his life was ever the same again.

The Wainwrights lived (when they weren't in New York or London or Paris) at Round Hill, in a white house that overlooks Deep Harbor, a house with tables by Duncan Phyfe, and early-eighteenth-century silver, and a late-nineteenth-century butler named Wiggin. Cynthia's great-grandfather had owned clipper ships; her grandfather had been Ambassador to France; her father had died in Tibet, in one of those early sporting attempts to climb Mount Everest. Her brother Hugh, who had become head of the family on his father's death, had two hobbies: Arab horses and tennis.

Jimmy was the fair-haired boy of Deep Harbor, the sort of boy other boys follow and older people admit has something in him—if he ever settles down. But he was the son of a man who worked with his hands and he might have lived all his life in sight of Round Hill and have become the town's leading contractor and builder without ever handing his hat to Wiggin save for a chance. The chance was that he was born to keep his eye on a ball and his weight moving forward while making a full swing with his right arm and so he never had to learn the lesson that makes all the difference between the kind of tennis you see everywhere and the kind you see at Forest Hills or Wimbledon or Cannes.

Hugh Wainwright saw Jimmy playing one afternoon on the high-school court and stopped his roadster to watch a moment and stayed to introduce himself.

"Look here," he said to Jimmy. "I wish you'd come up to Round Hill tomorrow afternoon and play with me. I think I could teach you to beat me."

That was the highest compliment a Wainwright could pay anybody.

Jimmy blushed, stammered, and said: "I'd like to."

"At three o'clock then," Hugh said.

Jimmy walked the long two miles up to Round Hill the next afternoon—up to Round Hill, and through the great iron gates, and into another world. A world in which the doorbell was answered by a large, grave man with pink cheeks and the air of a bishop, who waited silently for you to state your business and on hearing it came gravely to attention at a precise right angle to your line of sight and said to a point a yard above your head: "Mr. Wainwright is expecting you, sir." A world in which tennis courts were of an incredible turf, springy under your feet and very slippery to an old, worn pair of sneakers, and as perfectly kept as your mother's parlor carpet. A world in which new tennis balls appeared by the gross and rackets by the dozen, and in which form was a matter of as momentous importance as sound stone-work was to your father. A world in which you expected every minute to put your foot in it and somehow did not.

JIMMY got only one game in his first set with Hugh Wainwright. He was still awestruck and the unfamiliar bound of the ball off the turf disturbed him. But he worked hard, running his head off back and forth along the base-line, and making impossible gets. He held Hugh to 6-3 in the second set and to 6-4 in the third.

"You see," Hugh told him, "you're really a better man than I am. You're a natural-born tennis player and I'm not. How old are you?"

"Eighteen—nearly nineteen," Jimmy said.

"I'm twenty-three," Hugh said. "I've played at least five years longer than you have and I have to work to beat you."

Jimmy was still breathing hard; he could feel the sweat running down his cheeks; one knee ached from a spill he had taken on the slippery turf; the grass had stained his white ducks from hip to ankle where he had struck. He glanced at Hugh, immaculate in white flannels, looking as if he had just dressed.

"You didn't work as hard as I did," Jimmy said.

Hugh grinned. "I did manage to keep you trotting on that base-line," he admitted. "Your position play is bad and your backhand isn't sound."

Hugh illustrated the point about the backhand, sweeping his racket at an imaginary ball and drawing it sharply in toward his body at the finish of the stroke.

"You get a nice side-spin that way when you get it just right, but you can't really control it. You need to use top-spin."

He led the way to a brick practice wall, and made half a dozen backhand drives.

"Try it," he said to Jimmy.

Jimmy drove. They practiced against the wall for another hour.

"Let's have a shower," Hugh said finally. "You'll stay to tea, won't you?"

"I'd like to," Jimmy said, "but I think I'd better be getting on home."

What he really thought was that he couldn't go to tea in that house in the clothes he had on.

"Will you come again tomorrow afternoon?" Hugh asked.

"I'd like to," Jimmy said.

"I'm playing in a tournament over at Brixton on Saturday," Hugh explained, "and I want to get in all the practice I can. Would you care to drive over with me Saturday morning?"

"I'd like to," Jimmy said.

He tried to remember, walking home, if he had said anything except "I'd like to," all afternoon. He could have kicked himself for being so inept; and kicked himself again for caring so much whether he was inept or not. Why was it people with money made you so self-conscious? It wasn't the money, really. It was the things that came from always having money. It was manners. Hugh wasn't a snob. Or if he was a snob he was too much of a snob to show it. Jimmy wished fervently that he had never met Hugh Wainwright, and thanked his stars that he had. The devilish part of it was he liked the man and wanted to please him.

Jimmy played at Round Hill the next three afternoons, managing each time to decline tea. On Saturday morning Hugh called for him and drove him over to Brixton in his roadster. It proved to be an important day in Jimmy's life. It was the day he got his idea of the sporting thing.

HUGH happened to draw his only serious rival, a man named Sharp, in the preliminary round. Sharp took the first set at 11-9. Hugh took the second at 11-9. By that time the gallery was intensely interested and Jimmy wanted to yell every time Hugh made a placement. Hugh broke through in the ninth game of the third and final set. The score stood 5-4 in his favor and he was serving. Twice he aced Sharp. The points stood at 30-love. And then a linesman made one of those incredible decisions that are the despair of tournament players. He called Hugh's shot in when it was out. The gallery groaned.

The points stood at 40-love. If Hugh took one more point he would win the game, the set and the match. He deliberately served a double fault. The gallery clapped discreetly. Whereupon Hugh served another double fault. The gallery cheered. Sharp saw his chance and took it manfully. He drove Hugh's next service with all he had, passed Hugh at the net, and the points were deuce. Sharp proceeded to run out not only the next two points but the next two games. He won the match, 11-9, 9-11, 7-5.

Jimmy was bitterly disappointed and intensely admiring.

"You shouldn't have given him two points," he said to Hugh on the way back to Deep Harbor."

"I shouldn't have let him beat me," Hugh said.

"But you gave him two points," Jimmy cried.

"I had to give him two to even it up," Hugh said. "It was the only sporting thing to do."

Jimmy stole glances at Hugh's face as they sat side by side in the roadster. He saw that Hugh was the sort of man who would always do what he had done that day, and do it quietly and easily, asking no reward except his own knowledge that he had done what he called the sporting thing. Jimmy wanted to be like that—like Hugh. He would be like that.

"I'll get my revenge in about three weeks," Hugh said. "I'm going to coach you to beat Sharp and then let you enter the Stamford tournament."

"It can't be done," Jimmy said.

"You're better than you think you are," Hugh told him. "Only you don't play your best game against me."

"I know I don't," Jimmy admitted.

"It's what they call a mental hazard in golf. You'll get over it."

Jimmy wondered if he ever would get over it. Jimmy mightily resolved that he would get over it.

Hugh turned, smiled at Jimmy. "Won't you break your rule and stay to tea at Round Hill today?" he asked.

"I'd like to," Jimmy said.

"Good."

Neither of them said a word for the rest of that hour's drive. But Jimmy's mind was busy. He thought he had a long way to go to be the kind of man he wanted to be. He was still thinking when Hugh swung the roadster through the gates at Round Hill, and up the drive, and to a sudden jolting stop to avoid running into a girl on horseback.

"Why, hello, Cynthia!" Hugh said. "Where did you come from?"

Jimmy ceased entirely to think. He just looked. For years afterward he could recall every detail of that picture whenever he wished to; and often when he didn't wish to; often when he tried not to.

She was, he saw, a year or two younger than he was—a girl straight and slim and strong who sat her horse as if she belonged there; a girl without a hat, in a white blouse, and white cord breeches, and boots of that mahogany color good leather takes, and small silver spurs; a girl who looked straight at you out of singularly clear blue eyes and smiled with complete, warm friendliness.

Jimmy knew vaguely that he was being introduced, that he was acknowledging the introduction, that he must stop staring. He couldn't stop staring. He stared at the horse. It was a beautiful little horse, with a high arching crest, and the veins standing out on its neck, and its dark coat shining, and its thin nostrils quivering. It was exactly the kind of horse for such a girl to ride.

"JIMMY is staying to tea," Hugh explained.

"So am I," said Cynthia.

"Hurry it up then. You haven't time to change."

Her answer was to tighten rein. The horse tossed his head, whirled as if on a pivot, and cantered off toward the stables.

"What a horse!" Jimmy said to Hugh.

"Yes," Hugh said, "he's about the best Arab on this side of the Atlantic."

"A real Arab?" Jimmy asked.

"Pure Arab as far back as the stud-book goes," Hugh answered. "The same blood that put the heart in the English thoroughbred way back in the beginning."

But Jimmy was not really thinking about Arab horses. He was wondering what he would say to Cynthia at tea.

They had tea on a veranda, overlooking a garden with a sundial, and beyond, an orchard in which the branches were still black lines—black lines in a delicate pale green mist of new bud and leaf. Every time Jimmy caught himself staring at Cynthia Wainwright he looked out at the orchard. He could not talk. He could only stare and listen. The pitch and timbre of her voice captivated him. He learned that she had got home from school that day and that she was going abroad with her mother in a month or less to stay a couple of years. She would be sailing for Paris about the time he got his diploma from the Deep Harbor High School and started out, in overalls, to learn his father's trade, by carrying mortar in a hod. He was thinking how great the distance was that separated her world from his when she turned and asked him whether he was in school or college.

"I'm just finishing my last year in the high school," he said.

"And where are you going to college?"

Jimmy looked at her gravely. He had an impulse to shock her by saying, "I'm not going to college—I'm going to carry a hod." He was himself shocked by what he did say. He said: "I am going down to Yale, to the Sheffield Scientific School, to study architecture."

She flashed him a quick, interested smile.

"I'VE always wanted to be an architect," Hugh said. "I've been intending ever since I got out of college to pack up and go to Paris and the Beaux Arts."

"Why don't you?" Cynthia asked.

Hugh shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I don't care enough," he answered. "I'm more interested in horses and tennis." He turned and addressed Jimmy. "My father was a sportsman," he added.

"My father is a stone mason," Jimmy said. "I've always wanted to be a builder."

"That's the difference," Hugh announced. "You'll do something real—something useful—because you've grown up with the idea. I can't help admiring my father's courage. But I can't say he ever did anything useful, or expected me to."

Cynthia was silent, her chin resting in one hand, her eyes on the orchard. Jimmy felt that she agreed with Hugh.

Afterward, walking home, Jimmy's mood alternated between a queer, nameless despair and an equally queer, nameless happiness. How characteristic it was of Hugh and Cynthia to make him feel that he had an advantage because his father worked with his hands! And yet their view of life was so different that their words hardly meant what the same words meant to him. They spoke from the point of view of people who didn't have to do anything at all. Life asked nothing of Hugh except that he be a gentleman. His great-grandfather had seen to that. Doing something useful appealed to Hugh, in a certain mood, as a new kind of sport. Jimmy had to earn his living.

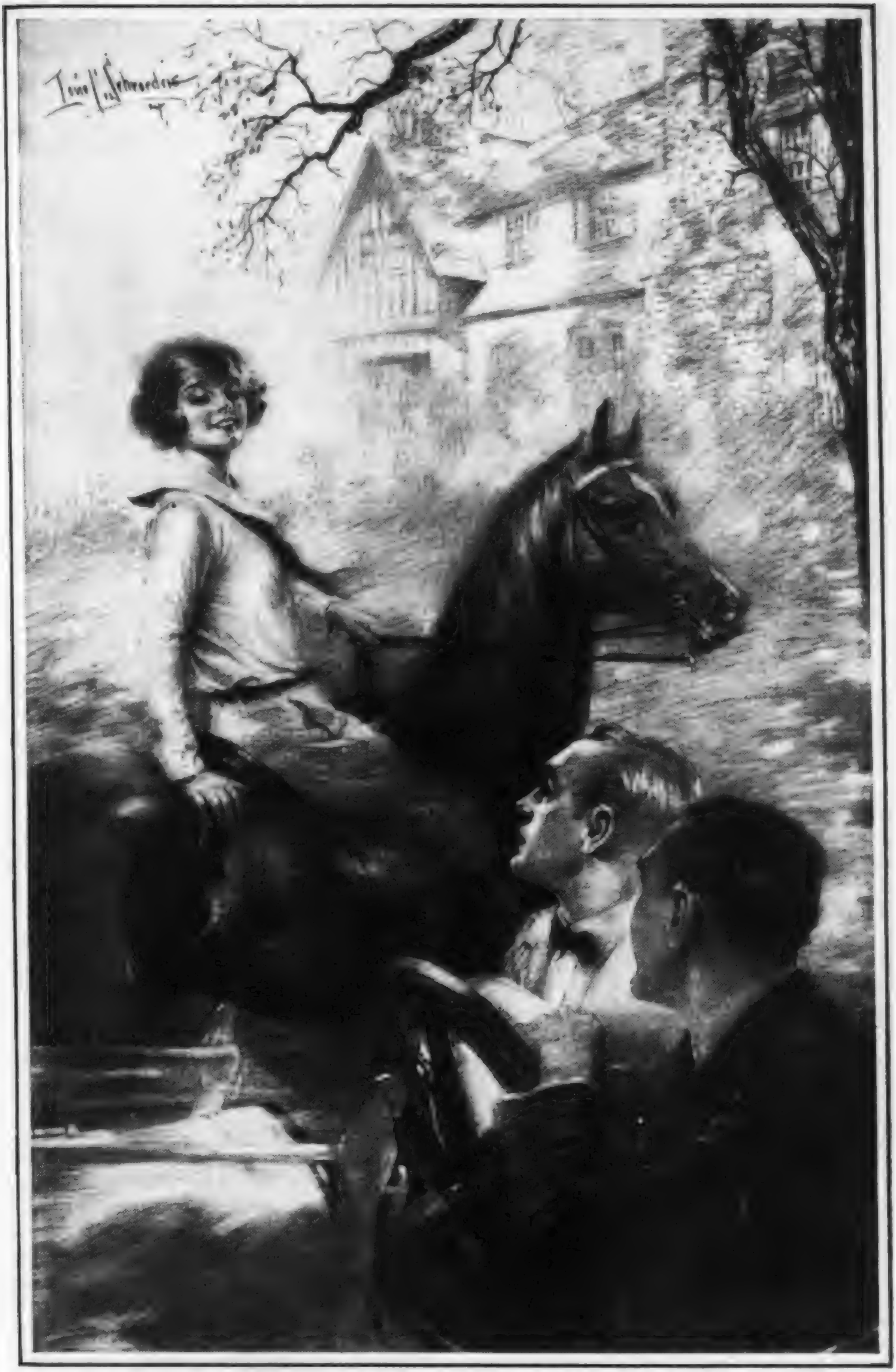
And now he had to earn his way through college.

How absurd it was to let himself in for that because he liked a girl and wanted to impress her! A girl he didn't know anything about, a girl he had seen for an hour and wasn't likely to see again more than once or twice before she sailed for Europe and out of his life forever. And yet he did know something about her. He knew everything about her. He knew that she made every other girl he had ever known seem pale or crude or silly. He had known a girl in the high school who had vitality—and a voice like a buzz saw. He had known a quiet, industrious girl who got 99 in Latin. He had known a girl who was pretty and vivacious, but had a weak, ill-made body and the mind of a canary bird. Of course Cynthia had every possible advantage, being a Wainwright. That had given her her poise.

Jimmy, going to sleep that night, saw that he must not try to know her. That way led only to a painful defeat, a defeat without a chance to fight. He quietly resolved never to see her again.

So in the next three weeks he saw her nearly every day. He continued to play tennis with Hugh and she was always there at tea. His game improved. He did beat Sharp in the semi-finals at Stamford, a long, hard five-set match, in which sheer stubborn stamina pulled him through. He lost to Hugh in straight sets the next day.

Hugh drove him back to Round Hill that day. It was a day in May as warm and sweet and still as summer with the apple trees in full bloom. It seemed to Jimmy, sitting on the veranda, looking out on the orchard, unendurably beautiful. He wondered, sitting there at tea with Hugh and Cynthia, if all true beauty were like that—



She was a year or two younger than Jimmy; a girl who looked straight at you out of clear blue eyes and smiled with complete, warm friendliness.

if it hurt. And then Wiggin called Hugh to the telephone and he was alone with Cynthia.

HE STOLE a glance at her. She caught him looking at her and smiled faintly. He had the strange notion that she knew he loved her. But how could she? He had the still stranger notion that she loved him. Which was, of course, absurd. For a brief moment it seemed to him as if, without ever saying a word, they had completely confessed themselves to each other—that each knew the other's heart—and that this was love. Then she spoke and Jimmy returned to earth.

"Jimmy," she said, "I'm going in to New York tomorrow to meet mother. We have some shopping to do on Monday. We're sailing on Tuesday."

He rose to his feet, took two steps toward her.

"I know," he said, "and I've got to go home now. I suppose I shan't see you again."

She did not answer directly. She stood up and looked out at the orchard.

"You always go home by the road—don't you, Jimmy?"

"Yes," he said.

"You needn't. There's a better way. I'll show it to you."

She led the way around the house. Jimmy saw an avenue of gnarled old apple trees that marked what had once been a farm road leading away from the older part of the house.

Cynthia paused and pointed and as she pointed her shoulder touched his.

"You go through the lane and you come out in a pasture and from there you can see your way down to the village across the fields."

"I see," Jimmy said.

He couldn't have said another word. The touch of her shoulder against his made him dizzy. He tried to think of words in which to say good-by. He wondered if it would be proper to shake hands with her. He decided it would. Of course it would. He turned to look at her.

Her cheek was faintly flushed, luminous. Her eyes were pools, clear, dark, deep. Her eyes contained depth after depth. He could not look into her eyes.

Without a word they walked side by side down the lane, between the apple trees, on turf flecked with sunlight, through air scented with apple blossom. Jimmy slowly got control of himself, recalled his mind to earth. When they got to the end of the lane he would turn, shake hands with her, say good-by, and go. She would understand everything—that he liked her a lot and that he wished she were not going away, and all that.

They paused, as if by mutual understanding, at the end of the lane. They could see the village—white houses in a thin line along the shore, and the harbor, and the point, reaching out into the Sound. They stood there, side by side, looking at the water. Then Jimmy turned and held out his hand and looked into her eyes, and she looked back into his.

Quite slowly, quite deliberately, he took her in his arms. He kissed her. For a moment he held her close, so close he could feel her heart beat.

"I love you," he said gravely.

"Yes," she said. "I love you."

He released her, took one last, long look at her and ran down the hill, across the pasture. There, climbing the stone wall, he stopped and looked back. He saw far off, nearly hidden in the apple trees, the flutter of her white frock.

The only sporting thing to do, he told himself that night, was to pretend it had never happened. He would not write to her. He might expose her if he did. It was inexcusable to have taken advantage of a passing feeling, which she was too young to understand. But nobody need ever know that it had happened, except himself and herself. She would forget about it, or remember it only as an episode.

His resolution not to write to her was shaken, but not broken, two days later when, in a square envelope, he got a photograph. It was a picture of her on the Arab horse, almost precisely as he had first seen her, as he would always remember her.

The way to forget her was to go to work, to earn his way through college, to become an architect. It did not occur to him that doing that was a way of remembering her.

JIMMY worked eight hours a day all summer carrying a hod, and four hours every night studying for his entrance examinations. He went down to New Haven in September with money in his pocket, passed his examinations, and found jobs by which he could earn his board and room. By spring he had managed the incidental task of earning his living so well that he could play tennis for a couple of hours every afternoon. As a freshman he wasn't eligible for the team. The next summer he got six dollars a day as a mason. In the fall he went back to college with a certain grim confidence. He knew now what a long way he had to go. Three more years in college would permit him to look for a job as a draftsman in some big office. Five years as a draftsman—perhaps six years—and he would be ready to practice his profession. He meant to graduate with honors, so that there would be no question about the draftsman's job in the big office.

And all the time a strange thing was happening to him. He discovered that he cared about architecture. The desire to build was in his blood. He had a feeling for building, as some men have an ear for music or an eye for color.

He graduated in the spring of 1917 into an officers' training-camp. Eight months later he was in France. It was four years since he had seen Cynthia; nearly three years since he had last heard from Hugh. He only knew that they were somewhere in Europe. He pictured meeting her in Paris. But he never saw Paris. He came home after the armistice to a world in which young technical men were many and jobs were few. He was lucky to get a place as a draftsman in the Chicago office of Morrill & Morrill, at fifty dollars a week.

After six months in the drafting-room, Jimmy solemnly took stock of what he had done. In the first place, the memory of Cynthia Wainwright was too much a part of his life. It was morbid thus to remember a girl he had neither seen nor heard from in years; would probably never see nor hear from again. He would cut that memory out of his mind. In the second place, he would need something to take her place in his mind. There would be another girl—eventually. But in the meantime he was going to study skyscrapers on his own. His days were occupied with almost mechanical work. But his evenings needn't be. Here in Chicago, where the skyscraper had been born, where Sullivan had lived and worked and struggled, he would study modern steel construction. And somewhere in that study he would find the way in which a skyscraper ought to grow to be true to its own nature.

For three years, Jimmy manipulated a T-square in the daytime and studied at night. And then he read the announcement of a fifty-thousand-dollar prize offered in New York for the design of a new hotel, a hotel thirty-one stories high, and conforming to the new law which forces a façade to step back from the street as it rises. He decided, knowing what it meant, to win that prize.

He did win it. He won it after a year's intense struggle, a year of working twelve and fourteen hours a day, a year when the idea of his building never left him until he went to sleep at night, and came into his head as he awoke in the morning. He found himself in New York again, in spring, with money in the bank, and fame to his name, and the deep, heartening joy of knowing that the hard-rock men were already blasting deep into the island of Manhattan for the foundations of his dream—a dream thirty-one stories high and solid as a mountain.

He was going, as soon as he found a place to live, to look up Hugh Wainwright. He wondered whom Cynthia had married. He wondered if it really mattered to him that he had succeeded, ten years after.

HE RAN into Hugh in Forty-fourth Street, two days after his arrival.

"I wish I'd kept in touch with you," Hugh said, as they shook hands. "Why didn't you answer my last letters?"

Jimmy stammered. He couldn't tell Hugh why.

"Never mind," Hugh said. "You're here now. You're coming to lunch with me. And after that you're going to Round Hill and play tennis with me again. And after that I am going to talk you into going into partnership with me—if I can."

Jimmy grinned.

"You haven't made any definite arrangement with anybody yet, have you?" Hugh asked anxiously.

"No," Jimmy said. "I've only been in New York two days. Nobody has asked me."

"But they will," Hugh said. "You can have anything you want now."

Jimmy grinned. He was afraid he looked red.

"You can, you know," Hugh insisted. "Anything—anything at all."

Jimmy, irrelevantly, wanted to ask him where Cynthia was, whom she had married. But he did not. Instead he went to lunch with Hugh and talked. Hugh had gone to the Beaux Arts for two years. And then he had been drawn into the war. Now he wanted to found an architectural firm. He had connections, opportunities—a bonanza.

"I've got everything—except an architect," Hugh said. "I can make a million, two million, in three years if I can get you."

LATER, at Round Hill, Hugh beat Jimmy at tennis in straight sets.

Hugh shook his head over that at dinner.

"I don't understand it," he said to Jimmy. "You're really out of my class. You ought to give me at least fifteen points. You're a better player than I am. You always were. But I still beat you."

Jimmy flushed. He knew why it was that Hugh beat him, would always beat him. It was because he felt, would always feel, inferior to Hugh. But he could not bring himself to say so.

"It's that same old mental hazard," Hugh continued. "It's what they call a complex. Have you got a Wainwright complex, Jimmy?"

"I—I certainly have," Jimmy said.

"But how can you have—now?"

"I don't know," Jimmy said. "I just have it—that's all."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "Cynthia is coming back in a week or two. She'll get you out of it."

Jimmy took a deep breath. "I'd like awfully to see her again," he said coolly.

"She has always been interested in you," Hugh said. I got a cable from her about you the other day."

"What?" Jimmy cried.

"She had read that you had won the Shelbourne Prize with your design and she was very happy about it."

"That's awfully nice of her," Jimmy said.

He wondered if he could control himself as well when he stood face to face with Cynthia. He wondered if he would have any of the same feeling he had once had about her. He wondered.

"Who," he asked calmly, "did Cynthia marry?"

"She hasn't married," said Hugh.

JIMMY sat, two weeks later, on the veranda at tea-time, talking to Hugh and Cynthia. He wasn't aware that she had changed—it was so like that day ten years earlier. She had changed, of course. She was ten years older. She was a woman. He wondered if she remembered that last day—that walk down the lane, between the apple trees. He knew she did remember it. But he wanted to make sure. He wanted her to say she did. And meanwhile they gossiped, about things that didn't matter.

"I think," she said suddenly, "that I'd like to see what the old place is like before it's dark."

She rose and looked out over the orchard.

"You may come with me, Jimmy," she said.

She led the way around the house. Jimmy saw again the avenue of gnarled old apple trees that marked what had once been a farm road leading away from the older part of the house.

Cynthia paused and pointed, and as she pointed her shoulder touched his.

"The old trees are still there," she said.

"I see," Jimmy said.

He couldn't have said another word. The touch of her shoulder against his made him dizzy. He tried to think of words in which to say what he felt. He wondered if he might take her hand in his. He knew he could. Of course he could. He turned to look at her.

Her cheek was faintly flushed, luminous. Her eyes were pools, clear, dark, deep. Her eyes contained depth after depth. He could not look into her eyes.

Without a word they walked side by side down the lane, between the apple trees, on turf flecked with sunlight, through air scented with apple blossoms. She must know he loved her, had always loved her. She must love him, or else she was punishing him cruelly.

They paused, as if by mutual understanding, at the end of the lane. They could see the village—white houses in a thin line along the shore, and the harbor, and the point reaching out into the Sound. They stood there, side by side, looking at the water. Then Jimmy turned and looked into her eyes and she looked back into his.

Quite slowly, quite deliberately, he took her in his arms. He kissed her. For a moment he held her close, so close he could feel her heart beat.

"I love you," he said gravely. "I've loved you for ten years."

"Yes," she said. "And you still don't know that I love you."

He decided that night that the only sporting thing to do was to tell Hugh that he was in love with Cynthia. It was Hugh's right to know, to object.

He told Hugh at lunch in town, the next day.

Hugh listened silently, frowning a little, his eyes narrowed.

"Well," he said, when Jimmy had finished, "what do you want me to say?"

"I want you—to approve, I suppose," Jimmy said.

"H'm-m!" said Hugh, and paused, thinking, while Jimmy waited.

"I'll have to be frank with you, Jimmy," he said finally.

"I want you to be," Jimmy said.

"You father was a stone mason—a man who worked with his hands."

"Yes," Jimmy said.

"And you have made yourself an architect—I'm not sure you aren't going to be the best architect in America, the one whose work will endure longest. You don't need to ask odds of anybody. And yet, somehow, you do. Somehow you're afraid of me. You've got some damned complex about me—and about Cynthia. It shows when we play tennis. You're a better man than I am on a court. But I beat you. It's as if you felt inferior.

"It's the one thing I've got against you. If it weren't for that I'd say marry Cynthia—there's no man living I'd rather have for a brother-in-law. But you'll never make her happy when you feel that way inside. You can't. You've got to get over it."

"I know," Jimmy said quietly.

"We're both entered in the tournament over at Stamford, aren't we?" Hugh asked.

"Yes," Jimmy said.

"We'll meet in the semi-finals if we aren't drawn against each other sooner than that?"

"Yes," Jimmy said.

"All right," Hugh said. "Beat me in that match and she is yours—gladly."

JIMMY talked to Cynthia that night. It took him a long time to get to the point of making any reference to what Hugh had said. He couldn't very well tell her all Hugh had said.

They were sitting together on the little porch looking out on the orchard when he finally brought himself to speak.

"I told Hugh that I wanted to marry you," he said.

Cynthia looked at him. She had a little eager, expectant look, as if she hung on his words, that gave him a most delicious sense of power.

"Hugh said he had no objection provided I beat him at tennis this week-end."

Cynthia laughed. "As if he had anything to say about us!"

"I agreed," Jimmy said stolidly.

Cynthia gave him one startled glance and jumped to her feet.

"You agreed?" she cried.

"Yes," Jimmy said. And as he spoke it seemed to him that her eyes, so tender, so deep, revealing depth on depth, had turned hard and cold. She stood tense, angry, hurt.

"Are you serious?" she asked.

Jimmy stared at her in dumb amazement. The tension went out of her body. Her shoulders drooped, as if she were very tired.

"I thought you loved me," she said.

"I do love you."

"You say you love me. Do you think if you really loved me you'd let it turn on a tennis match?"

"But you don't understand," Jimmy said bitterly. "You aren't letting me explain."

She shook her head slowly, turned to walk into the house.

"I do understand—now," she said. "I thought—I thought you had cared—all these years—just as I had. I thought—oh, I don't know what I thought."

She went quickly into the house. Jimmy started after her. And then he stopped. He heard a distant door slam. She was gone.

He got his hat and walked down to the village and sat in the station for an hour waiting for a train to New York. He got out at the Grand Central and walked—walked to the end of the Park and back. He hated her. He loved her. Was there any difference?

He went to his rooms in Forty-fifth Street and tried to sleep. After a long time he did sleep. When he awoke the thing was simpler. He saw what she wanted. She wanted what every woman wanted. She wanted to be won; more, to be taken, regardless. He hadn't done it. He hadn't even said the things he had wanted to say. He hadn't told her what she had meant to him these ten years. He hadn't made love to her—really. He hadn't let go—as if he were a man and she were a woman. He had been afraid to. He had been as much afraid of her as he had always been. And now he had lost her—unless he could find some way to let her know how much he loved her. No—not let her know—make her feel. He must make her feel that he wanted her, that he was going to have her, that nothing could stop him.

He should have told Hugh to go to the devil. He hadn't. It was too late now. He would have to play Hugh on Saturday and he would have to win. But what good would it do to beat Hugh now?

If he were half a man he would go out to Round Hill and carry her off—like young Lochinvar.

JIMMY walked out on the court that Saturday morning with a tight smile. Hugh had won the toss. He had chosen to serve. Jimmy stood just inside his own base-line—which meant that he was going to take Hugh's service on the rising bound.

He saw Hugh toss the ball, saw his racket swinging, marked the slice, saw the ball coming, saw Hugh running in. He could lob, of course. But he didn't. He did what he had never been able to do against Hugh before. He hit the ball with everything he had. The ball shot down the side-line, flat and fast, passed Hugh, struck just inside the backhand corner. Jimmy had taken the chance and won. He took the match in straight sets.

Hugh came running toward the net after that last sizzling drive cross-court to shake hands. Jimmy saw that he was glad. For a fraction of a second Jimmy shrank from that handshake, from the thing he had to say. Then he smiled to himself. He was no longer afraid. His Wainwright complex was gone.

"Jimmy," Hugh said, "she's yours."

Jimmy looked Hugh straight in the eye as he shook hands. For the first time in his life he felt quite simply and easily Hugh's equal.

"I know she is, Hugh," he said. "We were married at Brixton yesterday afternoon."

Hugh stared at him. "You mean you eloped?"

"Yes," Jimmy said quietly, "we did."

"After I'd said I wanted you to beat me at tennis first—after everything I said."

"Yes," Jimmy said.

Hugh slowly held out his hand again.

"Will you shake hands again, Jimmy?" he asked.

A Complete Novel in One Issue

The Caraways

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A GULF of misunderstanding separates a successful father and his son who, fresh from college, is still dazzled by the ephemeral quality of youth. In "The Caraways" Mr. Looms draws with unmistakable craftsmanship the picture of life in a small American city. In its grasp and dramatic power the story attains epical dimensions and yet, through its intimacy and truthful characterization, it remains a very human document. Coming in—

April *Everybody's* Out March 14

Adventures Among the Stars

Broadway Forever

The Publicity Campaign That Was a Perfect Success for Everybody Except the Press Agent

By Gayne Dexter

Illustration by S. George Phillips

BY INSTINCT that enables a showman to gauge a film's worth in its first reel, sleep through the remaining five and, on waking, judge correctly, "Knockout!" or "Just a program picture," or "A piece of cheese," Milton Glaze feared the worst for "The Unseen Bride." Five minutes after the introductory title he could have recited the whole story to Wallack P. Lathan, President of Firmament, who sat beside him.

Same doggone cloak-and-suit—pardon!—cloak-and-sword stuff, right out of the old hokum bucket, Milt told himself in despair as he watched the picture. Betcha whatya like this pallid Princess ud be forced into marriage with the cowardly king next door to save her dear papa. Huh, who'd want to save that ham? They oughta slain him in the casting director's office. . . . Oh, well, he'd be dead soon. There! Milt toldya so. Heart failure on the fourteenth stair. But the king still wants his proud beauty. The night before the marriage is to come off, she works out a plan of escape. Her chief adviser hot-foots it to the local gin-mill, once-overs the bar-flies and finds Paul Dare, who fled from Noo Yo'k to shield another's name.

"One billion oodles if you'll help a lovely lady in distress."

"Poor as I am, I want not money. No one will ever say Paul Dare would see a damsel suffah!"

Yup, all there, even the midnight visit; Paul standing like a noble goof while the priest reads the marriage service. Through the black curtains comes a lily-white hand. It's the big punch. Paul fits a wedding-ring on his unseen bride, emotes to the curtains, then staggers out like a guy one drink ahead of the ambulance. Beat Milty why they did it! *Comes the dawn.* Also the king to grab this dame.

"I have thwarted your base intentions. By this ring on my finger am I already wed!"

Kingly curses! He locks the door. They are alone in the room. "*Mine! Mine to work my will!*"

But Paul Dare has spent his marriage money on a shave and a hair-cut, and what a whale of a difference just a few cents make! He's on the glass dome piping off this little game. Close-up of Paul's chest. He jumps, clear through the roof, and crowns the king. The Princess loves him. Thus Paul Dare becomes the first American king of Housemaidsnee, and . . .

And already Milt heard movie orchestras playing "Hearts and Flowers" with "The Star Spangled Banner" as counter-melody.

GLAZE'S major anguish was that he dared not sleep. A snore would ruin his prospects. Exploiting "The Unseen Bride" for a try-out in Patterwark, N. J., promised three weeks' work at one hundred dollars a week, five dollars a day expenses;

more than that, it was his chance to show Lathan that, for three million dollars annual turnover on a releasing schedule of one picture a month, all Firmament required was the smartest press agent, exploiter, advertising executive, stunt man, sales manager and adviser to the industry—lil Milty. So he suffered without anesthetic. For Lathan liked his production with that colossal ignorance of business wizards who guard Wall Street's interest in the picture industry. To them all things are new. He admired the jazzy introductions that almost revitalized ancient essence; believed that to immerse bathing beauties instead of swans in the palace lake was directorial genius; regretted that censors must eliminate the living statuary and only long-shots of harem sequences would pass; and though this was his sixth inspection, laughed again when a vast harem inmate essayed to dance and, falling, shook the castle pillars.

Milt yielded to a chuckle, too, but restrained himself. Then, obliterating others, he sat very still and watched one figure too rarely there, but even in absence an influence which tided him through banal eternities until he hung on each reappearance.

Almost as an afterthought, quite insignificant, her name had concluded a cast-title of overshadowing importance: "Fat Fatima, played by Baby Betty."

But in no other way could she be overshadowed; for Baby Betty loomed in extraordinary quantities, an inflation of trunk and limbs that Firmament's wardrobe department had left scandalously revealed, as if the production budget could not be stretched to clothe this mastodon.

Glaze discovered a spark. First he studied himself. Did relief from tedium endow Betty disproportionately? No. Her bulk soon lost the interest of the unusual and Milt yet had to smother risible inclinations certain to betray the big idea shaping in his mind. Baby Betty, three hundred pounds or more, twenty years or less, lumbered to naturally humorous impulses, was a born comédienne. The whole roster of stars, swiftly reviewed, contained only one other. She was slight, wealthy, ready to retire, whereas Betty contradicted her in all things save inherent humor. For which Glaze offered thanks.

The screen's first fat comédienne!

"Milton Glaze presents Baby Betty—Five Hundred Pounds of Film Fun," he experimented, unconsciously speaking aloud.

Wallack P. Lathan dissolved Glaze's dreams. "Look at the picture!" he ordered. "And don't worry about Baby Betty. I discovered her. As soon as I saw how she worked, I signed her for a long-term contract to make comedies for Firmament. If you had my experience and Wall Street background you would realize that a wise man protects his investment. Thanks for the catch-line, though. 'Baby Betty—Five Hundred Pounds of Film Fun.' I must see if the advertising agency indorses it."

GLAZE sighed. Another idea, another slogan stolen. But one of these days, he decided furiously, he'd go into the clothing business, leave the fillum game flat, starving for brains until Will Hays took out a habeas corpus against the cloak-and-suit industry to bring Milty back.

Casting Betty from his mind, he concentrated upon Dora Dunsany, so beatific as the Princess that when righteousness triumphed Milt felt sorry. Her admirers were too few to bolster "The Unseen Bride." Moreover, the box-office paradox, "So good that she's bad," dismissed her; and by inverse reasoning invested Thais Eager with the profitable virtue of sin.

Given serpentine grace best expressed by concealment or, at most, a furtive peep through black lace seeming rather to be stenciled in bizarre patterns upon her than to require aid of hooks, eyes and dressers' nimble fingers, Thais did not have to be, strictly speaking, good-looking. Nor was she. Wherefore she distorted her face.

With her hair dressed this way and that, but always low, its lineament was seldom distinct, never twice the same. Her eyes and mouth were cardinal points, made grotesque by design. Caricaturists for the motion-picture magazines welcomed her as easy money, drew mercilessly yet rewarded her by preference over stars of greater magnitude not so solicitous of their pens. Her eyes, too widely set, she divided even further by penciling brows as semicircles beyond her temples. With both arches of her mouth accentuated and its extremities eliminated, her lips seemed eternally puckered as if to warn: "Oho! What I just learned about you!"

Make-up banished her nose entirely. True, a profile shot would have revealed it, but Thais had attained a sufficient degree of fame to dictate camera angles; for by her nose, of significant flatness, she was forever Leah Epschultz, who, though she progress from success to success, husband to husband, each of greater glory or status, might at any moment retrograde. It was always a question how far Thais could rise above Delancey Street. Because marriage has wrecked many stars, directors lamented, "Some day she'll blow in with a husband on her hip, that she found pushing a banana barrow."

Without violating propriety, however, Thais experimented three times: a camera man, a casting director, a director, in that social ascension, all of whom she divorced in quiet places as Leah Epschultz, escaping publicity, and maintaining public persuasion that vamps are really angels in devils' masquerade.

WHIMS governed her. Today she flashed gorgeously on the set, absorbing every ray of Kleigs and Cooper-Hewitts, within herself transmuting all, then reflecting into the camera the refulgence of audience appeal which palliates a multitude of sins. But tomorrow she draggled about her dressing-room in slatternly kimono and worn-down mules, exceedingly unraveled, happy and deaf to exhortations that she dress and come down to work.

As Firmament's biggest star—no outstanding honor, since Firmament was a small company—she received one thousand dollars a week and repaid the novitiate Wallack P. Lathan in iron-gray hairs.

"Guess I'd better build the whole campaign on her," Glaze decided, quitting the projection room. "Rotogravures and Sunday supplements will run ten pictures of a vamp for every ingénue."

"Patterwark isn't New York," Lathan reminded him. "There aren't any rotogravures and the Sunday supplement comes in boiler-plate."

"Uh-huh. But when lil Milty goes into the Sticks the New York papers send feature writers to see what he's gonna do."

Lathan's lean jaw locked back a grin, but the ends of his brusque mustache quivered suspiciously. Glancing at his watch, he said: "Thais Eager should be in my office now. Like to meet her?"

Milt didn't mind if he did. Hams were hams to him.

So he entered the presidential sanctum with due disregard for its impressiveness—he'd been in plenty better—but emerged in the blissful state of one smitten between the eyes but too wrapped in constellations to feel any pain. Thais swam in his consciousness, in drugged recesses of his brain as well. His heart, which had existed hitherto for purely organic functions, its devotion to duty enabling him to term romance a malady of adolescence and middle age, was a void so exquisite that he dared not breathe deeply. Milt's fall had been ten minutes' accomplishment, each moment ecstatic. This Milty who had called himself hard-boiled!

In every radiation the screened Thais was but a shadow of the woman who, taking his hand, simultaneously meeting his glance, had retained the hand softly, almost caressingly, one moment longer than the formality of introduction required. She treasured the glance, too; returned it with eyes that seemed startled, just awake, questioning, at last accepting her own quick chaos, while Glaze sat vaguely among psychological tremolos.

Ignorance distressed him. Mob emotions he could excite, analyze and translate into so many dollars at the box-office, without himself sharing any of these spurious hysterias. But this upheaval was personal and alarming. Ridiculous!

"Fade out on Milty! I'm falling for her," he said to himself, and sank.

LATHAN offered cigarettes. "Mr. Glaze is handling the Patterwark engagement, Miss Eager. He just mentioned that he would key the whole campaign to you."

Her lips lifted to Glaze. She propelled a vein of cigarette smoke toward him, laughing some message along it.

"Of course you're happy about it," Lathan commented. "But when Dora Dunsany hears, she'll want to tear up her contract. . . . Glaze, couldn't you give Dora an equal break? They're co-starred, you know."

"It's all the same to me," murmured Thais.

"Were I to marry an absolute stranger tomorrow I would find in him some element to be loved. In Mr. Glaze, for instance." Lathan withdrew into himself and watched.

Her disinterest spurred Glaze. "She's on your mind; snap out of it," he cautioned himself. Yet he protested vigorously, "Course Dunsany will kick, but she oughta know by now her stuff was anty-cue before Nellie the Beautiful Cloak Model was even born." Two minutes ago he would have so described the whole production, but under Thais's influence originality glowed wherever Dora was not.

"Stack her up with Miss Eager and see the difference!" And Milt grew impassioned about it. "You come into the fillums from Wall Street, huh, not through the showmen's ranks? Well, here's one thing Wall Street couldn't learn you. Next to a dog like Strongheart, a vamp scores the highest point in universal appeal. Men like her for herself, women go crazy over her clothes.

"Now, how do I sell 'em? Gimme some full-length fashion-stills of Thais and the department stores will eat 'em up for window displays. I'll stage a Thais Eager fashion parade that'll cost us nix. Loan me one of her dresses to show in the lobby and every flapper in Patterwark'll copy it for her next petting party. Drug stores relabeling their stock, 'Parfum Thais Eager—Attar for Every Heart.' Howzat? Beauty parlors boosting the Thais Eager Bob—no, she ain't bobbed; so we'll play it the other way: restorers, shampoos, 'Banish gray hair and look like Thais Eager' dope." Milt waved an emphatic finger. "Leave this to me, Mr. Lathan. If you knew more about pitchers you'd know that when Milty Glaze peels off his coat your stock jumps twenty points."

Rising, he wheeled about the room. Thais must sense that his fiber was for her.

"And the men!" he shot out. "Here's a sure-fire stunt. Daily feature story in one paper, 'Lessons in Love by Thais Eager, Screen's Greatest Vamp.' And for the other, 'Men Who Have Made Love to Me: Confessions of Thais Eager, Firmament Films' Vamp-de-Luxe.' Howzat hit you?"

Lathan twirled his mustache dubiously. Such publicity might incite Thais. "Hasn't it been done before?" he demurred.

Thais laughed soothingly but bantered for fear Lathan might detect the truth. Her eyes half closed to Milt. "Not the way I will tell it. With me love that isn't instant is boresome; marriage only an adventure when it is unexpected—to a man who has come suddenly into my life! Were I to marry an absolute stranger tomorrow I would find in him some element to be loved. Quick! *Comme ça!*" She snapped her fingers. "In Mr. Glaze, for instance. We would make an ideal combination. The wife, the star—the husband, her press agent and manager."

Milt soared. Lathan withdrew into himself and watched. Suddenly:

"Very well, Glaze. Go to Patterwark tomorrow. That will give you almost two weeks before opening date. The cashier will advance your expenses."

"You'll see something," Milt assured, and added with intent, "If you want me between now and tomorrow I'll be at the Tenelba."

In his hotel room he maintained over the telephone a vigil of dreams and despairs until night and a ring relieved him. Thais crooned. Milt swarmed into tuxedo and oblivion. They dined somewhere, danced somewhere, circled and circled Central Park in Thais's limousine, star of all vamps and star of all press agents so mutually engrossed that planets hid behind clouds and wept impotently against astral limitations. It rained.

MILT noticed this only after Thais had left him at the Tenelba. From his window he laughed into the drizzle, for his own happiness, for Broadway's triumph over Wall Street. Wallack P. Lathan, the financial wizard who protected his investments! Milt jeered him. Let Lathan protect this one—Thais Eager. Try and do it!

Milt ud wham into Patterwark, pull some stunt for Thais, some dinnyhazer that'd crash New York papers and syndicates all over the country. And nothing a guy could do ud be too good for her. He'd make her the best bet in pitchers, marry her like they planned tonight. Marriage abrogated all contracts. Then quick curtains for Wise-Guy Wallack and two thousand dollars a week from Supernal, Astral or Schlitz Super-Features. Double what she was drawing now. Then pipe Milty, will ya, sittin' pretty. Love! Lucre! And on twenty-four-sheet posters, trade ads, credit-titles, the line to make these dumb-bells that called themselves publicity men look:

"Mifton Glaze presents Thais Eager—Siren Voice of the Silver Sheet."

His ideas of marriage were not mercenary, however. In Milt's consumed state incidental advantages seemed trifles.

TRADE vernacular termed Patterwark a tough spot for a try-out. And a try-out is the wily arrangement whereby a small-town theater astounds its patrons with the news that through the manager's eminence in film circles, they will be priviledged to witness the World's Première—again in stagger-caps, World's Première—of this notable production; whereas the engagement really is to answer the manufacturer's doubt, "Wonder if the rubes will stand for it."

An exploiter moves mountains to break house records that trade advertising may bray: "In Hottest Summer in History 'The Unseen Bride' Knocks Patterwark Cold!" One swallow makes a veritable Tophet.

To his own distraction Glaze proved Patterwark tough.

Enos Roberts, manager of the Arcadia Theater, leaned against the ticket booth and indicated shade trees, lawns, spotlessness and sleep of Patterwark's main thoroughfare. Here and on other streets as beautiful dwelt 20,000 souls. He mentioned that.

"And next year I wouldn't be 'tall surprised if we had 21,000," he added with the nonchalance of pride.

"Counting the cemetery?" inquired Milt.

"Maybe," retorted Roberts, "but not the world-beating Broadway press agents we're burying there."

"Broadway? Broadway?" Milt pretended to puzzle. "Don't mean to tell me you've heard of *Broadway*. It's fifty miles away."

Very carefully Roberts knocked out his pipe in a fire bucket and picked stray ashes from the tiles. They must be unblemished, his theater the town's criterion.

"For the next three weeks this tank's gonna be jazzed up," announced Glaze, inspired by prevailing somnolence. "Mr. Roberts—what's your name? Enos, huh—well, Enos, old kid, I got a raft of stuff that'll keep this little box-office busier'n poison-ivy at a Sunday-school picnic."

"Last press agent who came here said something about a one-armed paper-hanger," responded the manager without enthusiasm.

Glaze studied him. "What sorta pall-bearer are you? Or maybe you're one of these business men."

"Exactly. And proud of it! Proud of this town, too!" Roberts answered hotly. "So before you start anything, listen. Patterwark's been plagued with more wild and woolly publicity men than any other town in Jersey. We don't want you. We're wise to you. Newspapers, police, department stores, everybody. The papers will give you one line of free space for every inch of paid advertising. Signed feature-stories by the stars—*outski!* This town lives on the silk mills; the girls are all spinners, weavers and loom hands. They're so sick to death of silk that the department stores are scared to display anything but gingham, and they'll fire you downstairs if you mention fashion parades. The drug stores have been skinned so often by commercial tie-ups with the movies that the Rotary Club passed a resolution against them. You're closed out there. Now look down the street, anywhere you like."

Dragging Glaze to the sidewalk, Roberts swept horizons. "Do you see any billboards, any six-sheet stands, any posters?" he demanded. "Not one. Not in Patterwark. The Chamber of Commerce cut them out. Our town's our picture, not somebody's cigarettes or shaving-cream.

"Better burn your snipes," advised Roberts, reloading his pipe. "The Police Commissioner runs the public-service and he'll jail you one day and fine you one dollar for every piece of paper you post. Three thousand snipes would be three thousand dollars and eight years' jail, figuring roughly."

"They got to catch me first."

"When 'The Unseen Bride' plays here they'll know you did it."

Glaze prodded his superior wisdom into the managerial shoulder. "Knowing ain't catching. You don't think I been all my life in the show game—carnivals, circus, pitchers—without being wise to sniping laws. I gotta be grabbed in the act."

"That's so," Roberts agreed. "Just the same, the Ku Klux Klan will run you out of town."

"Sure. Sure they will," Milt derided. "Le' me ask you this. Who's gonna tell 'em?"

"They'll find out," drawled Roberts, wandering away. Purely as an afterthought, "You see, I'm a kleagle."

"Sa-a-ay!" roared Milt. "When you get a good pitcher, how in hell do you let people know?"

"Well, a two-inch ad in the papers sometimes. And my wife looks at the program. If she sees anything she likes, she goes around and tells everybody."

THE day was a failure in all things but Roberts's predictions. Glaze talked long and earnestly with both newspaper editors, who referred him to the advertising managers, who in turn believed the proprietors would grow enthusiastic over Thais Eager's intimate confessions. Milt certainly must meet them—when they returned from Europe. The department store, to which he illustrated a hundred short cuts to wealth through the magic of Thais's fame, was interested, but insisted that he first obtain an indorsement from the Rotary Club president. The general manager of the drug store, visibly swayed by Milt's eloquence, offered cooperation if the vice-president of the Rotary Club approved. When Milt hunted up these officers, the vice president was the gentleman he had interviewed at the department store, while the president was the drugstore potenate. He awed a sweet young thing at the beauty parlor, but as her mother owned the place, didn't like movies, and was married to the police commissioner, Patterwark's beauties missed the delights of a Thais Eager shampoo, its populace was robbed of a street ballyhoo that Milt mapped with fury of defeat. The commissioner sanctioned no outdoor parades.

The defensive machine Patterwark had constructed interlocked in every cog. By nightfall Milt's self-esteem was lacerated. He drowned his misery in a fervent letter to Thais; thus heartened, strode from street to street, finishing at the Arcadia Theater, where the slow trickle of patrons moved him to lament:

"Welcome to Patterwark, the silk city of New Joisey. But don't step on the worms."

Roberts joined him. "Well, how did you get on?"

"Everything lined up nice," Milt said airily, but belied himself with a snarl. "Where do you get off not helping me, anyhow? I'm here to stir things up for you. I'm your friend, Enos. I want to make dough for you."

"Yes. You break records with 'The Unseen Bride,' then raise the price to every exhibitor in America," Roberts answered. "What good does it do me? I own both theaters. There's only so much money for movies in Patterwark. If I fill this week, I perish next. That's against economic principles. Income should be steady. I'm a business man."

"Just want to say one thing, Enos." And Glaze said it with infinite dejection. "Next business man I meet I'm gonna paste fair in the eye."

FOR nine days Milt flung himself against literature, commerce, law and order and was routed. Thinking spans between frustrations, his nights bore schemes more desperate as the opening date approached. A stunt for Thais! Picturing her, he urged his pen, achieved no more than futile scratches on a pad. Sometimes he sat taut with eyes closed, sometimes drooped on the edge of his bed, emitting low noises strangely like whines.

"Le' me show her what I can do."

On the ninth night he entered a cigar store, purchased a newspaper and cigarettes and idled to light one. A man who followed him bought a motion-picture magazine. A girl, coming directly afterward, glanced over racks of publications. Glaze wondered what she would take. A magazine of detective tales. She paid and departed, but Milt's eyes pursued as though they had not observed correctly.

"That ain't right!" he burst out. The store-keeper stared, amazed. "Scuse me," begged Milt, recovering himself, "only I just seen somepin for the first time in my life." He went out then, muttering: "A guy buys a fan-magazine, a dame takes mystery stories. What sorta town is this?"

Where sleeping marts cast shadows, he halted, fumbled nervously at his chest and ribs. His shout startled echoes. All Patterwark was addressed as one fist slammed into the other palm. "You lotta punks! I gotcha on the mat! Le's go, Milty, le's go!"

An early-morning train set him in New York. He telephoned Thais, who promised to be at Firmament's office by ten.

When she arrived, he was waiting in the reception room. They spoke quietly and hurriedly, ignored the desk-clerk who wished to announce them, and descended upon Wallack P. Lathan, who scented a combination in restraint of trade. He started to rise coldly, but Milt's arm stretched across the desk, almost thrusting him back.

"Sit down, chief. And laugh. Patterwark's licked."

Lathan sank undecidedly. Behind Milt, Thais nodded him down. She lounged cross-legged and enigmatic, a quirky smile involving the problem her visits always represented. Lathan wished that Thais could be locked in a safe-deposit box and withdrawn only when it was time to clip an interest coupon from her.

"Talking your language, Patterwark's a close corporation with interlocking directorates," declared Milt, one hand in his pocket, the other raised emphatically. Thais must admire the pose. "Reg'lar language, it's a freeze-out for press agents. Most guys ud come back feet-first, but nix on lilies for Milty. I looked the dump over, chief, and Patterwark's got the primest selection of dowdy dames in Joisey—so bad the men buy fan-magazines so's they can see women wearing somepin else besides sign-writer's muslin. The dames read detective yarns. Strong for mystery. Sight the sunshine now?"

Lathan shook his head. Glaze pitied him.

"I'll run this slow so any child can work it. A personal appearance of Thais Eager will catch the men. But you can't afford to send her there more than one night, and your fillum ain't good enough to run the rest of the week unsupported. Now 'The Unseen Bride's' wallop is where the Princess's hand comes through the curtains and Paul Dare marries some one he don't know. Talking here the other day, Thais said her next marriage must be unexpected, an adventure; if she married a stranger she'd find some cause to love him. We take her up on that for the niftiest wedding stunt ever run. We ask single men in Patterwark, 'Will You Marry Thais Eager?' Any one can nominate. We put the names in a hat. Out comes her arm through the curtain just like in the pitcher. She picks a name. The manager announces the winner. Up steps the happy guy. Wedding on the stage last night of the run. New York papers please copy."

LATHAN managed an incredulous, gaspy, "Wha-a-a— I beg your *pardon!*"

But Milt's voice, twanging out audacity, had a hypnotic quality. "You ain't heard the half of it yet. Maybe that stunt sounds good. It don't bring the dames in, though. They got to have mystery. Now who's in the cast? Thais, Dunsany and three or four other bimbos who look a million dollars even if they are hams. What do we do? Leave Thais's name out of the stunt altogether and crash, 'Boys—Will You Take Firmament's Biggest Star for Your Unseen Bride?' Howzat! There's institutional advertising for your company; you register the Firmament brand. You whang home the title of the fillum. You got mystery for the flappers; they come night after night wondering which actorine it is that's gonna steal the local sheik. All the cake-eaters are taking a chance. We play capacity for the entire run, then on the last night instead of the first, Firmament's biggest star stands behind the curtains, draws a name outa the hat, the manager pulls the tabs aside. *Presto!* Thais Eager!"

"Glaze! What the deuce is this?" Lathan stormed up. Gripping the table-edge he struck forward glares that bent harmlessly upon Milt's hide.

"It's Broadway Forever!" the star-maker exulted, waving an imaginary flag. "Grander than Wall Street ever dreamed of. The papers will jump at it. Double-truck stories with three-color illustrations in every syndicate supplement. A. P. wires and front-page breaks all over the country. Four-column cuts of Thais and her hand-picked hubby; interviews long as your arm in the fan-magazines; covers; and theaters booking 'The Unseen Bride,' and every other pitcher Thais ever made, faster than salesmen can write contracts. Mitt me, chief! I'm there!"

Instead Lathan stood helplessly before Thais, who was Eager in name but calm in demeanor. "You—you wouldn't do this," he pleaded. "It's crazy!"

"I'd do anything for publicity," she returned placidly. "This is worth half a million dollars in free space, besides the romance of such a marriage."

"Good Lord, though! He might be a mill-hand."

Her shoulders rippled in a shrug. "My father was a pants-presser."

With caged steps Lathan paced about; after a while he sat heavily, picked things up, put them down. Wall Street gave no guidance here.

"Glaze, I forbid this," he said at last.

"You can't prevent it," Thais interjected sweetly. "Surely I may marry as I please. Even if you cancel the engagement at Patterwark, I myself will send Mr. Glaze along to arrange the affair at the very first town the picture plays. Exhibitors will fight to have the stunt for their theaters. Mr. Lathan, I need publicity. You let some advertising agency, which knows nothing of pictures, handle our stuff. All it does is give you tabulated charts showing how many children under the age of seven see Firmament productions in Schenectady on a Monday afternoon. That's business. This is Broadway; and to be on Broadway a woman must receive one mile of press-cuttings every day. Why, you're smothering me!"

"Atta girl," Milt applauded under his breath. He wondered where Thais acquired her accent; admired it, too. Bokoo Ritz!

Lathan seized his only weapon. "Glaze, you'll need money to do this. You won't get it!"

"Ah, thay not tho," lisped Milty. "Your cashier paid me three weeks' salary and expenses in advance. I'll gamble that, because when the industry hears about this wow I can draw five hundred bucks a week from any company you like to mention." He pounded the table, each blow a victory. "They want hunches—stunts—ideas! That's me!"

Thais smiled encouragement.

PATTERWARK couldn't believe it. One day before "The Unseen Bride" began, half-page advertisements in both newspapers invited the white and unmarried to wed Firmament's biggest screen star, whose modesty demanded that her identity be hidden as yet, but whose heart could be reached by the corner coupon, inscribed with the sender's name and address and mailed to The Unseen Bride, care of the Arcadia Theater. Milt's ads were masterpunches gloved in that most dignified and provocative of all type, Wedding Text. As decoration he added two cooing doves.

But Patterwark excused caution as manly reticence, and of its eligibles only three replied posthaste. Putting each coupon into a separate envelope to preserve anonymity, Milt placed them in a drawer in Roberts's office, which office he had usurped by talking Enos into evacuation. The rest of the morning he spent in hanging paper wedding-bells and black dominoes about the theater entrance; and, having discarded regular lobby posters as too blatant for so tender an occasion, set up imitation marriage certificates six feet tall, whereon the local sign-writer had daubed pink roses. No prize cabbage ever looked as large. He rented carpets to spread as a bridal path from ticket booth to foyer, sprinkled confetti liberally and, when Roberts arrived, was surveying his handiwork from the sidewalk. Milt glanced warily. If this rube kicked—well, let him kick. He merely owned the place.

Instead Roberts surprised him. "Why, that's the prettiest lobby display I've seen!"

"Atmosphere. Puts 'em in a sentimental mood," quoth Milt.

IF PATTERWARK'S bachelors were slow to respond, its women were won by mystery. 'The Unseen Bride' played that night to feminine contingents, scrutinizing Firmament's beauties, guessing, chattering in departure while Glaze listened and smiled. An audience was ever an audience. He knew these people who wondered aloud what star would marry from Patterwark. With their curiosity piqued, they would talk at home tonight, tomorrow and for days. He desired nothing more.

When Roberts admitted a record Monday, Milt assured him: "Ditto, all week. Ask me why. Every dame went out knocking Firmamant's beauts, all swearing they were better looking than any actress on the screen. So right now I'll betcha there's two hundred big brothers, steadies and semi-detacheds, filling in the coupon they saved from yesterday's paper. Tomorrow night—dames and more dames just so's they can knock first-hand. Enos, you won't have ten per cent men in your house until Saturday night; then it's gonna be as stag as a Shriners' convention."

Tuesday's advertisements extolled the charms of Firmament's galaxy; Wednesday's told their salaries, enumerating what one thousand dollars a week will buy. Thereafter Milt saved the remnants of his salary but brought camera men to photograph four hundred and eighty-three letters that covered Roberts's office like a snowfall. He passed a leisurely week. There was no need to work. By day he took a siesta in the hotel lobby, once paid a flying visit to New York, and returned with walking-stick and cream linen spats that made his subsequent excursions pageants. Jauntily swinging the cane, coaxing bespatted feet to slow rhythmic tread, he rehearsed on Patterwark the condescension Broadway must expect from Milton Glaze, magnate, producer, and husband of Thais Eager.

By himself, however, he stripped off artifice and surrendered to the ardor of Thais's letters, read, re-read and cherished. Twice daily outgoing mails bore his replies. Each evening he telephoned her, then, finding something still unsaid, skeletonized his ecstasies in night telegrams.

He imagined Wallack P. Lathan, who protected his investments, in various frenzies; he sympathized with Enos Roberts for being merely a business man. They heard no music in feet shuffling on sidewalk and lobby tiles; in grunts and pardons begged for many impacts; in voices: "Two in the orchestra." "Six upstairs; nice ones, and we'll come every week." "Listen, you! Stop shoving me!" Eventually the commissionaire's bawl, "Standing-room only, ladies, please." A greater triumph: "House full for tonight's performance. Spesh-ul overflow matinées tomorrow at three o'clock. Buy your tickets now to be sure of a seat!"

Milt reveled in the heat and press of it all; from cacophony swelled his own magnificat.

Every new face at the hotel he labeled staff correspondent, and he conjured traveling salesmen into feature-writers. He peacocked among them. How did that line go? When a dog bites a man it's good news, but when a man bites a dog it's a case for the S.P.C.A. Ben Franklin was not far wrong. Milt spelled it S-P-A-C-E.

Lathan telegraphed capitulation on Friday morning.

Heartiest congratulations on Patterwark success. Go to Palladium Theater, Trenton, tonight and spend Saturday looking field over for another campaign, but be certain to return to Patterwark Saturday night in time for stunt. New York papers all carrying stories. Regret my earlier objections and reiterate congratulations.

WALLACK P. LATHAN.

Glaze hugged the telegram, vowing, "In Trenton I'll work another just as big for Mrs. Milton Glaze."

When he departed five hundred and twenty-four sealed envelopes filled the lottery barrel from which Thais would draw. Perfectly innocent, those envelopes, for every coupon bore the name of Milton Glaze. Torn paper trailed for miles behind the Trenton train as Milt, with his suitcase on his knees, shredded five hundred and twenty-four legitimate hopes and flung them through the window, confetti for himself.

BY TEN o'clock Saturday night, Glaze had not returned. A telegram awaited him in Roberts's office, but more than this, Enos yearned for him murderously. The depot clerk reported the Trenton local forty minutes late. Rubbing clammy palms, Enos glanced fearfully at the barrel, then through the window on the auditorium. Rows and rows of male heads sloped down to the stage. In the bright rectangle above, "The Unseen Bride" had already entered its second last reel.

Enos crept by back stairs to the operating box.

"Run it slow—slow," he breathed as a man who desires to prolong one agony lest worse befall.

"Can't stretch it past ten-thirty," said the projectionist.

"Have a breakdown. I must hold them in their seats until quarter of eleven."

"Why, what's wrong?"

"Glaze can't get here before then. And I want him bad!"

"Gee, is that piker so important? . . . Orright. Anything to oblige."

Snapping the film, he switched off his lights and smoked on the fire-escape for ten minutes while the audience yawned, talked and at length clapped insistent measures of rebuke. Roberts leaned on his desk. He seemed to be near death. The cashier slipped rubber bands around stacks of bills, wrapped up the last cylinder of silver, checked totals and opened a ledger for comparison.

"We've beaten all Saturday nights by seventy-five dollars and broken the full-week record by four hundred and twelve," she exclaimed. "Mr. Glaze must be awfully clever."

"He is," agreed Enos pathetically, then, reaching for the telephone, called the depot again.

"Ten o'clock from Trenton due ten-forty-eight," the clerk informed him.

He sought the open air. Curious throngs packed the lobby. Front-lights illumined massed faces stretching into darkness across the street. Their numbers made Milt's betrayal direr. He had a quaking thought that for some reason Glaze dared not return to the scene of triumph.

All too soon the orchestra organ boomed "The Star-Spangled Banner"; curtains fell and house-lights flooded; the audience waited.

Each envelope accused Enos as he slowly wheeled the barrel to the center of the stage and set it on a dais in order that the very bottom could be reached. He watched the restless house. Perhaps it was as well that Glaze had not come back. Nevertheless he dawdled, fussed over trifles, hoped for his own salvation and, gulping frequently, talked away the minutes in a managerial announcement until impatient clapping silenced him.

The theater dimmed. The projection machine poured a broad ray which quivered, then steadied upon the curtains. They parted slightly and a white arm, sheening against black drapes, entered the barrel. An envelope was withdrawn and when Roberts had taken this, the arm disappeared.

He extracted the coupon. His voice grew resolute. "Is Mr. Glaze present?"

THE name ricocheted from row to row through lobby and crowded street as Milt panted to the fringe. He plied his stick and felt strange feet upon his spats. Shouting his name as passport, he advanced by jolts and surges. A policeman wove toward him to assist. Crowds parted then, and in the familiar shadow of the law Milt gained the main aisle. There he paused to perfect details of his grandeur.

That face massage and shampoo in Trenton were kinda ruined now. Never mind. How'd he practice it? Oh, yup! Derby under the right wing, cane poised so-so in the left. Spats? H'm-m-m! Not so good. Well, maybe the marks wouldn't show. Now, Milty, do your stuff! You know—the new-style walk you've got. Irresistible like a leading man. Aw-rightee! Onward Christian soldiers!

To the stage where Roberts averted his face.

"It gives me great pleasure to announce that Mr. Milton Glaze has won the hand of Firmament's biggest film star in 'The Unseen Bride.' I now desire to present to him his future wife, Firmament Film Company's biggest star." Gladly Roberts swept the curtains back. "Baby Betty!"

Three hundred—four hundred—no, five hundred pounds of film fun waddled out, coy and maidenly in every billow.

The rest was chaos and the organ shrilling, with drums, brass, reed and vox-humana pipes wide open, Mendelssohn's Wedding March.

Before the 4:23 A.M. to New York arrived, the star-maker had hours and hours of solitude on the Patterwark station wherein to read the lengthy telegram that was Roberts's parting gift. And telegraph keys are the silent drama's tongue.

Milton Glaze, Arcadia Theater, Patterwark.

Wall Street experience teaching me the wisdom of protecting all investments I have solved the problem of Thais Eager by marrying her this morning. We both send regards. She uses a queer expression, saying she is the finest little yes-girl in the movies and always works on the basis that with press agents, a little love goes a long way. Perhaps you know what that means. Business men always fulfil contracts to the letter and Baby Betty is Firmament's biggest star by exactly one hundred and seventy pounds. Appreciate very much your efforts in her behalf. This stunt will establish her as screen humorist. Will also use the story for her first comedy for Firmament. Again congratulations, thanks, regards. WALLACK P. LATHAM.

Milt crumpled the message into a ball which he hurled to the other side of the railroad tracks.

"Broadway Forever!" he groaned through cupped hands. "Bunk!"

A Dreamer Turns Doer

The Phantom Caravan

The Boy Who Once Was the Despair of His Family Proves to Be Their Only Hope, for the Very Reason That Made Them Despair of Him

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

THERE was much, Ammiel Spottswood reflected, about life that one didn't know and couldn't learn—that one had to find out through experience, and experience alone.

He had spent years in despising the people who had tried to order things for him by rules. Well—he had been just as wide of the mark as they. His grandfather, alone of all the people who had ever touched his life, had understood. He hadn't preached. Dying, he had left $10,000 to be given to Ammiel on his twenty-fifth birthday.

The money came to him on the heels of a climax of disillusionment: boyhood, school, college, war, Phyllis and his queer, unsatisfactory engagement—that she had known enough to break. He meant to take the money and live in pleasant idleness in France. Instead his brother Jonas broke down, and he was plunged into the management of the business. Already $5,000 of his capital had gone to Clem Thorsen to finance Adrienne's father's superheater. The rest was pledged to enable his college friend Padgett, who was going to marry Phyllis, to be an architect instead of a partner in her father's cosmetic business.

And now his brother Stephen was in a mess with a chorus girl named Elsie. Old Steve—the irreproachable, the man sure to go to Congress! And anonymous letters were reaching his invalid wife Cecily! He had to take care of that. How, he didn't know—yet. He'd have to see Elsie, whoever she turned out to be.

IT WAS a sunless day in February, and Elsie Collins, standing at the window of her room in the New Western Hotel, shivered a little. It was not a cheering prospect upon which her eyes rested. A wilderness of gray brick, with here and there a stray patch of sooty snow, and in all directions columns of dun smoke, rising stiff and straight as if they held the weight of the leaden sky.

"I guess people in jail feel this way," she muttered as she turned away. "Only—in jail they know where dinner's coming from."

To look upon her room gave her no greater pleasure. The New Western was what is called a "second-class" hotel. There was a faint spot on the counterpane of her bed, discernible for its whiteness against the faded yellow of the linen. Near the doorway the nap had left the carpet. Around the window the trim had separated at the joints, and the finger-marked sill was wavy with repeated coatings of paint. In the bathroom she had a glimpse of tawny brass where nickel once had been, and she caught a reflection of herself in a mirror which was discolored near the edges.

It was a bare room, thriftily and necessitously furnished, save for a steel engraving

Suddenly Adrienne felt her wrist crushed in a grip that made her wince. "Listen." Against the light she saw him stiffen. "D'you hear it—the sirens!"

of a Greek temple in a tarnished frame, and a Gideon Bible on the dresser—the latter anchored by a slender chain, she noted with a cynical smile.

It was getting darker, and she shivered again. Of all the hours of the day, she hated the onset of winter twilight most of all. A little whimpering sigh escaped her. And then, because it was the nearest thing to hand, she opened the Bible, and read the first words she encountered:

> And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed, the end shall be.
>
> The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia.

With an exclamation, she closed the book. "Who the hell could understand *that?*" she said aloud, and scornfully. But the words of the passage persisted in her mind. She stood quite still for a moment. "At the time appointed the end *shall* be," she repeated softly. The hard bright light that people usually saw in her eyes was gone, and there was soft weakness in the way she presently dropped into a chair.

With an oath, she leaped to her feet. "*I* don't know what the end will be," she snapped harshly, with a glare at the Bible still swinging from its chain. "An' neither do *you!*"

She went to her trunk and kicked open the lid. "What's needed is a drink, ol' Dan'l in the lions' den," she laughed, taking out a flask. "Otherwise the end'll be that we'll jump out of the damned window!"

The telephone buzzed as she tossed off the whisky. Her eyes flickered. "Comp'ny, praise be!" But the light faded as she heard the message. "Who?" She paused, considering. "Oh, well—rush him up." And she added, as she put up the receiver, "Even that pink lollypop's better than nothing—tonight."

A minute later there was a knock on the door. "Come in," she ordered. "An' don't knock as if you were cracking a safe."

The door opened with a faint creak, and Ralph Destine entered, both hands extended. "How are you, Elsie, my dear?" he queried sympathetically. "I heard you were laid up with a cold, and it's such a beastly day—"

"You thought you'd cheer me with your presence, eh? Nice of you, Ralph." He amused her. And it amused her, too, that he was engaged to Stephen Spottswood's sister.

"May I?" He took a silver cigarette case from his pocket.

"Sure. An' throw the ashes on the floor. All the other men do."

He chuckled appreciatively as he crossed the room to deposit the match in the wastebasket. "Do you always receive your callers—here?" he asked silkily.

Her face hardened at the question. "An' if I do? It's their lookout—not mine. 'Twouldn't look so well for *you*, honey, if anybody caught you here."

He raised his supple, superbly manicured fingers in a gesture of deprecation. "*I* am here on business." There was the faintest of accents on the pronoun. "Business, my dear."

"Oh! Want that money back you lent me?" She made a lazy movement toward the purse hanging from the bureau.

"MY DEAR, what a question! Certainly not. I—well, fact is, I've decided to write a play for you." He sat back, his fingers interlaced, watching the effect of this announcement.

"Why, you poor fish! *I* can't act," she said. "Don't you think I know it?"

"Ah, but you can!" he insisted. "You—"

"Put away your pipe, kid! I've got a nice figure an' a face that'll pass in a crowd, an' I can dance—some—an' that's the whole bill."

"But that isn't so! With your voice and bearing—your inimitable élan—why, Elsie, a more graceful, spirited creature never walked this earth—"

"You talk as if I was a race horse."

"And with your ability to wear clothes—"

She surveyed him coldly, but without rancor. "Honest, Ralphie, d'you think you can kid me? That takes an expert."

He put out his hand and covered hers. "My dear, I only want to help you." His voice was slightly tremulous.

She freed her hand, and reaching in a drawer behind her, took out a handkerchief. "Here, Ralphie. Dry your eyes. I don't want you crying all over my lovely carpet."

"But I'm serious," he urged plaintively. "I—"

She nodded. "I know. They always begin that way. They're so sorry for the poor workin' goil—so anxious to help—"

"You don't doubt my motives?" he queried with an injured air.

Her lip curled. "Doubt your motives? Not me. I know 'em too well."

"But, Elsie—"

"Listen, Destine." Her languorous ennui had left her, and she spoke with harsh conviction. "You're all right, I guess, an' some folks think you're a headliner when it comes to writing. Maybe so: I'm no judge. But half your stuff I can't understand, an' the other half I think ought to be buried in quicklime. You go big with some people, an' that's all right with me. I never went to college, so there's lots o' things I can't appreciate. But there's one subject I know all the way through to the back o' the book—an' that's *men*."

"But, my dear child—"

"Can that stuff! Another minute an' you'll be tellin' me how much you love me. Love!" The scorn she put into the word was scorching. "Good God, I'd like to meet a man that knows what love is!"

Destine sprang to his feet. "Child, when your eyes flash like that, you are—*gorgeous!*" He put out his arms in a gesture of invitation and suppliance. "How can a man know aught of love until a beautiful woman teaches him?"

She merely stared at him, evil words trembling on her lips at the fatuous complacency of the fellow. How could he be so obtuse as not to see the infinite scorn that burned in her eyes? "You—" she began. But the excoriation was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

"*Who?*" Her voice was incredulous as she spoke into the instrument. "Say that again. . . . Yes, sure—ask him to come up." She turned and faced Destine's hot eyes. Her lips were twisted in a whimsical smile. "You're more of a rotter than most, Destine," she said evenly. "I've gotten used to married men. But when they're just engaged—"

"Oh, come! Is my little Elsie playing Puritan? Or is she playing a joke on her Ralphie?"

The inscrutable smile deepened. "Yes," she said, after a pause. "It's a joke. A peach of a joke! That—that was your future brother-in-law on the phone."

The abrupt change in Destine's expression was ludicrous. "He—he's not coming up?" he gasped in consternation.

"That seemed to be his idea," she drawled.

Nervously, he straightened his necktie, and his fingers flitted over his pale face. "I—I must go," he stammered. "I—if Ammiel met me here, I—Really, I must go."

She made no move to leave the door. "But you were so entertaining, Ralphie. I couldn't bear to have you go—just yet."

"But I must," he pleaded, almost tearfully. "Really—if Ammiel—"

"Ammiel?" she repeated with a mystified frown. "Who the devil's *Ammiel?*"

BEFORE he could answer there was a sharp knock on the door, and when she opened it she found herself facing a slender young man with a humorous mouth and dancing, questioning eyes. She recoiled in surprise. "Who—who are you looking for?"

"Miss Elsie Collins," he answered gravely.

"That's my name, all right. But what's yours?"

"I am Ammiel Spottswood—Stephen's brother."

"Oh! But you look so young. I thought—"

"That's another brother," he smiled. "I'm the baby of the family."

She found his smile irresistibly engaging and she was suddenly sorry that she had not dismissed Destine in time. But it was too late for regrets. She opened the door wider. "Won't you come in?" Then she stepped aside to watch the meeting of the two men.

There was no concealing the confusion on Destine's face. "Why, hello, Ammiel!" he said nervously. "I—I didn't know you knew Miss Collins."

"I don't," replied Ammiel. His face was a mask. Whatever his emotions, he chose to hide them.

Destine was creasing his hat with restless fingers. "Well—er—I must be going. Ta-ta."

"Good-by, Ralph," answered Ammiel composedly.

Elsie said nothing until the door had closed on the utterly routed Destine. Then she burst forth. "Weren't you—*surprised* to see him?"

Ammiel's nod was candid. "Never more surprised in my life."

"He—he was talking about a play he's writing."

Ammiel nodded again. "I thought it must be something like that." There was an odd note in his voice—something faintly derisive, she decided. It nettled her.

"To what do I owe this call?" she inquired coldly.

He smiled at the question, and the tone, and she felt her anger evaporating. "I'm a specialist in minding other people's business. May I sit down?"

"Help yourself." She pointed to a chair. "Whose business are you minding now?"

"Well—" He hesitated, his forehead wrinkling. "I suppose the best place to begin is the beginning. My sister-in-law—Steve's wife—got an anonymous letter."

"She did, eh? Let's see it."

Silently, he took the letter from his pocket and handed it to her.

Her lips compressed and the real color strove with the artificial on her cheeks as she read it. "Are you hinting that *I* sent this?" she snapped.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not much of a hinter. Did you?"

Disdainfully she tossed the letter into his lap.

"No, I didn't send it. But I have an idea who did. There's a girl in our company who—well, we aren't on the best of terms."

"You think she sent it?"

"It's possible. But—why did Stephen send you to ask about it?" She had grown suddenly suspicious and watchful.

Ammiel grinned, shaking his head. "He had a fit when I said I was coming. You see, he—the family—well, they haven't much confidence in me."

"But you have a lot in yourself, eh?"

"It isn't that," he said earnestly. "But instead of just wringing our hands over just the situation, I thought—if I could have a talk with you—perhaps—we might straighten things out."

"A splendid idea," she agreed ironically. "But what is there to straighten out?"

"That I don't know. I only know that Steve's a wreck—scared stiff over what you may do to him. What *are* you going to do?"

"I suppose you gave him some good advice?" she countered softly.

"Well, I told him I thought the best way to find out the other fellow's cards is to let him play them."

HER lips curled in a crafty smile. "If your brother wants to give me a lift, now and then, that's his affair, isn't it?"

"I like to call things by their right names, Miss Collins," said Ammiel quietly. "Blackmail is—"

Her eyes flamed angrily. "That's a bad word, my friend. I—"

He nodded ready agreement. "It's a bad business, too. The sooner we admit that, the faster we'll get on. And—"

"See here," she interrupted. "If your brother owes me something, don't you think he ought to pay the bill?"

"But it isn't only Steve who pays," pleaded Ammiel. "It's his wife—and his mother—and—"

She was grimly disdainful. "He had plenty of time to think about them."

He hesitated a moment. "All right—let's admit that. Now then—suppose he decides he's through—what then?"

The crafty look came back into her eyes. "I'm sure he wouldn't decide anything so—unwise."

He checked her there. "I understand. If he balks you'll spring the trap."

"He's got his choice," she murmured.

Ammiel rose. "I suppose he has," he said sorrowfully. "I guess he'll have to face the music."

"It won't do *you* any good," she warned.

"Me? Why, *I* haven't any reputation to lose."

"Haven't you? And don't you mind?"

Something in her voice made him turn. "Say—I don't like to leave this way. I—oh, hang it, I don't blame you for putting the screws on Steve! But the poor devil—"

"Poor devil!" she scoffed. "Poor! I can think of another word."

"Oh, you've got him wrong," he insisted earnestly. "He's got another side to him—the ways lots of men have. He—"

"*I've* seen only one," said Elsie.

"I understand," he said gently, with a sympathy in his manner that touched her. "But Steve's other side is just as real as the one you know. It—"

"Why should I care about that?" she interrupted. "I have myself to look after."

He surveyed her pensively for a moment. "You're pretty hard, aren't you?"

She tossed her head with a grating laugh. "Yes—when I want to be. Perhaps your psalm-singing brother doesn't know it. You might tell him."

Ammiel smiled wanly. "I certainly haven't accomplished much, have I—coming here? But I guess nobody ever can accomplish much in messes like this. All you can do is take your medicine—and start over again."

"You mean?"

"Steve's reputation may go pop—and the family's with it. It'll be the first scandal in Spottswood history, far as I know. But it's better to be free than respectable, don't you think?"

Before she could reply, the door had closed and she was alone. "Well, of all queer ducks!" she murmured. "And what a knockout of a smile!"

THE residence of the Casper Jenkins Blandings was a paradox. It was cramped and ill lit, badly designed and worse built, had electric light only downstairs, enjoyed plumbing arrangements that were, to use the kindest word available, obsolete—and despite all this, earned a very high rental. The explanation was the location, which was aristocratic. And at that, it cost more than they could afford.

Every month Casper groaned over the rental, and was profane over the incidentals. The landlord had built thriftily, using, for example, a number of odd-sized windows he had picked up at a house-wrecking sale. This, of course, meant odd-sized curtains for the tenants. Doors sagged, pipes burst, and ceilings cracked with great frequency. It was, to be sure, the landlord's duty to repair them and, if pressed for three or more months, he sometimes did. The Blandings, in helpless fury, usually did the repairing themselves.

For the most part, however, they took their expense and discomfort philosophically, esteeming their address to be worth all it cost. They could scarcely have comprehended, had they heard it, the remark a carpenter made to his wife, that theirs was a better home than the Blandings' and he was glad he wasn't them. They would have considered this quite absurd. The carpenter was nobody.

The Blandings were distinctly not "nobody." They were on every worth-while "list" in town. It was a rare week, during the winter, when they were not to be seen at the opera, in some one's box. Casper belonged to all the clubs worth mentioning, and Hester was a member of some of the most exclusive charitable committees. But despite all this, there were times when they were not contented.

"I don't know where it'll end," sighed Casper as he was dressing for the reception to the French ambassador, which Hester, against his advice, had insisted upon giving. "And it's so really ridiculous! I have enough to live on—with what you have, more than enough. And yet—we're always up to our neck."

"Oh, I guess we're no worse than anybody else," said Hester indifferently, as she adjusted a pair of amethyst earrings, and leaned back to study the effect.

"You shouldn't have taken the Tivoli Club for this party," he continued plaintively.

"We couldn't have had it *here*, could we?"

"I suppose not," admitted Blanding. "But—we needn't have had it at all."

"Certainly we had to," was Hester's response. Her tone was a trifle petulant. "We haven't done a thing for ages. Good heavens, Casper! We can't go on accepting everything and not doing our share, can we?"

"N-no, I suppose not. But—the people we play around with are all so much better off than we are. It—"

Hester turned from her dressing table and looked at her husband curiously. "What's the matter with you, Casper? Are you ill?"

He continued brushing his hair for a moment without replying. Then with a heavy sigh he put on his coat and faced her. "No, I'm not ill. But I'm tired—most awfully tired."

"Tired of what?" She spoke with a slight asperity. She sensed what was coming, and she did not want to listen to it.

"Oh, this life we're leading! I'm getting so I don't sleep, thinking about it. There were two collectors at the office yesterday. I do wish you'd keep up better, dear."

Her eyes flared angrily. "How can you say such a thing! There isn't a woman you know could do as well on the allowance you give me."

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1925

"It's all I can afford," he protested. "Things haven't been going very well, you know."

"Do you have to tell me that? Don't you suppose I miss my check from Bremling-Spottswood? When *will* they pay dividends again, Casper?"

His narrow shoulders rippled under his coat in a faint shrug. "The Lord alone knows. That's one of the reasons I'm worried. We really haven't much we can count on except the bank stock."

"As good as gold," she said comfortably.

"Yes, but if anything—"

"You could—get a position," she suggested, a little timidly. Rather to her surprise, he showed no resentment.

"I've thought of that," he said. "But what could I do? It's so long since I've really worked at anything. And even if I did get a job—you wouldn't like that, would you?"

She reached over and pressed his hand. "No, dear, I wouldn't, of course. I'd hate having you tied down to a desk. We do have such good times together—you and I."

He let himself drop into a chair. "Even if I did get a position," he said, thoughtfully contemplating the cigarette he had lighted, "I couldn't get much of a salary. We'd be in the same fix we're in now. We—"

"I do hope you're not going to say anything about economizing," said Hester coldly.

He shook his head. "It's past that, my dear. I've figured and figured. We can't live on any less."

"Well, what *do* you want to do?" She stamped her foot irritably. "If you get any gloomier, I'll scream!"

"Scream, if you like. But that won't alter matters. The fact is, we're spending more than we've got. One of these days we'll come a cropper."

HESTER turned to stare at her reflection in the mirror. What she saw pleased her—at first. It was a finely bred face that returned her scrutiny, from the broad, low forehead to the determined chin. There were no hollows in the flesh, which had just enough flush to save it from pallor, there were no lines about the eyes—cool, composed eyes—and the nostrils and mouth were at once delicate and strong. It was, she decided quite detachedly, a face worth looking at twice. And then, as if the glass were bewitched, a subtle transformation took place. The warm pink skin became porcelain. The lips grew thinner. The eyes stared back at her in flinty calculation. And tired shadows took the place of dimples. She turned away in a kind of terror. "You—you're not very cheerful, Casper," she whimpered. "I—I don't think it's quite kind of you!"

She hoped he would put his arm around her, and with a kiss banish the goblins that had attacked her. But when he spoke it was as if he had not even heard her half-uttered plea for succor. "I guess I'll have to resign from the Racquet Club," he said morosely. "And we certainly shan't go South this winter."

"I'll do anything you say," she sighed with an accent of despair. "We'll take a cheaper house—out on the prairie—or a little flat, somewhere. That'll save one maid."

"It needs more than that, Hester. Just cutting won't do. We— Oh, confound it! What's the sense of talking like this?" He flicked the end of his cigarette into the fireplace with a querulous oath. "We've done it before—and nothing's ever happened. I ought to be working. We ought to be doing a lot of things we've never done—and never will do. This is the sort of life we were born to, and it's the sort of life we'll keep on leading until something happens."

"Maybe—times'll be better pretty soon?" suggested Hester hopefully.

"Maybe. They can't be worse. Well—" He stood up, looking at his watch. His sharp features relaxed in a wan smile. "On with the dance! It's time to go."

She surveyed him critically. Then she took hold of the lapels of his coat and kissed him. "Anyhow, there won't be a better *looking* man at our party."

He acknowledged the compliment with a bow. "D'you know," he said irrelevantly, as he helped her on with her furs, "it strikes me as very queer: Steve's insisting on your asking that Collins person—not like Steve at all."

"It was queer," she agreed. "But what could I do?"

"I've been asking around a bit. She's—well, rather notorious."

"I suspected as much," sighed Hester.

"Dear, I wish I hadn't asked her. But maybe she won't come."

"Maybe not," echoed her husband, not very hopefully.

Hester's annoyance became wrath when they were presently in the cab on the way to the Tivoli Club. "One would expect Ammiel to be impossible—he's never anything else. But Stephen!"

"I find it just as surprising in Ammiel. He's a queer lad, to be sure. But he's never shown any interest in women—that kind of women."

"Wretched creature!" stormed Hester. "She probably thinks he's a millionaire. Nice, wouldn't it, if he ran off and married a millinery clerk."

"But it hasn't reached that point," he protested.

"Oh, hasn't it! You should have seen his face when I ran into him that day. Positively infatuated, I tell you."

AT THE club, Hester left her husband and set about a brief checking of details: the music, the refreshments, seeing that maids were posted here and footmen there, arranging all things great and small with the precision and foresight of a field marshal on the eve of a battle. In matters social Hester knew the importance of organization.

But when, half an hour later, she stood receiving the early comers, she was a picture of serenity, giving an impression that all was extemporized. And when, at last, the guest of honor arrived, full of protestations at his tardiness, she was able to make the already crowded room not incongruous with her description of "asking a few friends to drop around to meet him."

Casper shuttled busily between headquarters at his wife's side and the outpost he had established in an adjacent room, where, behind a closed door, white-coated waiters dispensed potable spirits. These were, as he assured each newcomer, analyzed and guaranteed safe—a needless assurance, he reflected, surveying the crowded, smoke-filled room. Death and destruction might lurk in the clinking glasses—none hesitated in draining them.

Sensitively, he listened for criticism. It should, of course, have been champagne. But gin—even the post-prohibition squareface—was costly enough. But there was evident no disdain for the humble cocktail. And the head waiter presently came to him for authority to open more bottles.

At her place by the side of the Ambassador, Hester smiled and chatted with those who came to take her hand. But she heard not a word of what they said. Like an orchestra conductor, her ears were pitched to the hum of voices around her. It was halting and sporadic, at first, like firecrackers the night before the Fourth of July: and her heart sank. But the volume presently swelled, and the note rose higher. She sighed with relief. The party was "going."

Just then, from the front hallway there came a flash of light, accompanied by a muffled roar. It was followed by the half-stifled scream of a woman. Hester paled; but her manner was composure itself as she asked the Ambassador to excuse her while she investigated the unseemly noise. She was seemingly calm as she asked a servant at the front door what had happened.

"Oh, nothin', ma'am. It was a fellow outside takin' a flashlight."

"A flashlight? Of whom?"

"I dunno, ma'am. It was a lady."

"Oh!" Hester turned, her fears at rest. Nothing worse than an impertinent newspaper man.

As she crossed the hallway a woman emerged from the dressing-room, hesitated a moment, and then came toward her, hand outstretched. "Mrs. Blanding? How are you? It is Mrs. Blanding, isn't it? I'm sure it is! I'd know you from your pictures."

Hester halted. So far as she knew, she had never seen the woman before. Guardedly, she made a rapid appraisal of the other's appearance. In an instant, her experienced feminine eye had her classified. She was fashionably gowned—a trifle too fashionably, in the kind of fashion which, being just a step in advance of the mode, is therefore behind it. Her coloring was a bit too high, and on her outstretched fingers were too many rings. She just missed, thought Hester.

"I'm sorry if I scared your party," laughed the woman a little nervously. "It was that photographer. He—"

"Photographer? *Why* was there a photographer?" Hester's voice cut like a knife.

"It was Feinberger's idea. He thought

he'd give me a little publicity. You see—I'm Elsie Collins. Is Steve here?"

Hester's slender nostrils dilated, and the color rose in her cheeks. Her soul seethed with fury. She stiffened, until the cords in her neck ached with the effort at control. For a long moment she stared at the amiably smiling Elsie. And then, like a grenadier executing a volte-face, she turned and stalked back into the crowded ballroom.

FOR another moment Elsie continued to stand as if frozen. The smile slowly faded from her lips, and the half-extended hand dropped limply to her side. "Smack!" she muttered through clenched teeth. Then the osprey plume in her hat dipped jauntily as she tossed her head in defiance. It was defiance, she told herself—not surrender. But she went back to the dressing-room. She glared at her reflection in the mirror as she put on her leopard-skin coat. "I don't think I'd like that dame. Still—" The hard expression left her features and a philosophic smile succeeded it. "You didn't expect her to *kiss* you, did you?"

She was more puzzled than angry when she emerged from the dressing-room for the second time. Why, even before she had uttered a word, had Mrs. Blanding determined that she did not belong? She had dressed with special care. There was nothing about her costume, she was quite sure, which was not correct. And yet Mrs. Blanding had not hesitated an instant in her classification.

She was busy with this problem when she heard her name spoken, just as she was going out. She turned, long enough to see Ammiel. She waved to him, and was answered with a friendly smile. Different stuff, she decided. He had the same cool eyes, the same finely cut nose, the same determined chin as his sister. But there was a deprecating gentleness about him, in place of the chill arrogance which marked her.

The encounter had been brief, but Elsie had had time for a glance at Ammiel's companion. "And if *I* can't get by," she reflected as she waited for her taxi, "how does that doll do it?"

Ammiel's companion had been dressed with no pretense of fashion at all. There had not even been prosperity in her appearance. Not to mince words, the girl, though of good bearing, carrying her tall figure with easy grace, had been downright shabby.

"I'll bet she doesn't belong, either," said Elsie, a little wrathfully. "It's beyond me!" She shrugged her shoulders and got into her cab. "Don't try to break De Palma's record for the straightaway mile," she warned the astonished driver. "Or I'll crown you, see!"

Ammiel, too, was overwhelmed with the strangeness of the folk who came and went from the exclusive Tivoli Club.

Meanwhile, Ammiel, insensible as most men to the arcana of dress, was having difficulties with his companion. "I don't dare go in!" she cried. "I'm a sight."

"All the poets in the Golden Treasury couldn't half express how good-looking you are," was his fervent answer.

She continued to hold back. "I should never have come. I told you that."

"Too late now," he said cheerfully. "In you go. If you don't go quietly, I'll carry you. That would give Hester a thrill!"

"You'd be quite capable of it, too! But, Ammiel—so many people!"

"They're just people. Come."

She still shrank, clutching his arm like a timid child, until they reached the threshold of the larger room. There she underwent a singular transformation. Her hand left his arm, and she crossed the room to where Hester was standing, with the calm poise of an empress. If she felt the curious glances leveled at her, she gave no sign of it.

Ammiel was amazed. He stood for a moment staring at her, then recovered himself and presented her to Hester.

"How do you do?" There was no interrogation in the chill indifference with which Hester uttered the words, and she immediately averted her head. But the hauteur suddenly left her face, and she winced with pain. Her wrist was in a grip like the jaws of a wolf. "The whole route, sister dear," whispered Ammiel smoothly in her ear.

It was Hester's genius that she always made the best of situations. She knew to what lengths the impossible Ammiel was capable of going. So she nodded quite graciously, and introduced Adrienne to the Ambassador. That done, she expected that the girl would have the decency to move on.

But Adrienne gave no sign of moving. "I am glad of the opportunity of meeting you again," she said to the Ambassador. "My father so often spoke of you."

"Your father—yes?" The diplomat's voice was politely inquiring.

"He was André d'Aulignac. You stayed at our house in Couseix."

The old man's bland suavity suddenly left him. "André d'Aulignac!" he exclaimed with an evident emotion. He forgot himself so completely as to revert to his native tongue. "*Et toi—tu es la p'tite game d'outre mer!*"

"From Grand Rapids," she laughed. "*Justement!*"

THE old man turned to the bewildered Hester, his eyes dancing with the first real animation they had displayed that afternoon. "Perhaps my best friend, madame—André d'Aulignac—*mort pour la patrie*. And to find his daughter here—*quel bonheur!* Come, *ma coquine*—what a little rascal you were at Couseix! I remember well. Come!" He took Adrienne's arm. "We must have a little chat. Tell me all about yourself."

Ammiel gave his sister a wink as Adrienne left them. "You look flustered, Hettie. Her daddie probably worked in the store where the Ambassador buys his millinery."

"Nonsense!" said Blanding, who was very literal. "It's plain she comes of good people."

"Better make sure," warned Ammiel, ironically.

Blanding took the injunction at its face value. Maneuvering for an opportunity, he presently broke in on Adrienne and the Ambassador, under pretense of bringing her an ice. And then, when Ammiel whirled her off in a dance, he pursued his interrogation of the Frenchman.

"Miss—er—d'Aulignac's a great friend of my brother-in-law. He—er—seems very fond of her. Naturally, his mother—ah—well, that is to say—"

The Frenchman did not occupy one of the highest diplomatic posts in the gift of his government without reason. He smiled quizzically under his beard. "My family and Mademoiselle's have been intimate—for some time. Not very long, as such things go. Mine, you see, is parvenu. We began yesterday, you might say. Only since the time of Napoleon. But the D'Aulignacs—they were well established when the Templars went off with Peter the Hermit."

"Is that a fact!" exclaimed Casper, who had never heard of this Peter person, and to whom the days of the *Mayflower* constituted antiquity.

The diplomat's amused smile deepened. Long and close study of the American democracy had convinced him that human nature was the same, regardless of the side of the Atlantic on which it dwelt. "The D'Aulignacs, I should say, were one of the oldest families in France—if not in Europe. Certainly, history mentions a D'Aulignac having a brawl with Odo, Count of Paris, over a game of chess. And among their titles—"

"They are—*titled?*" Casper's eyes were widening.

The Ambassador chuckled outright. "Oh, yes! Mademoiselle d'Aulignac might, if she chose, call herself marquise. But of course, in your great republic, one has no use for titles. You are so advanced. You realize their absurdity."

"Oh, yes—of course!" murmured Casper, cogitating means of getting to Hester with the information. Ammiel's return gave him the opportunity.

Hester listened to him with no outward show of emotion. "She wears her clothes well—even if they are shabby," she said thoughtfully. "She's a lady." Then her lips compressed in a fashion which Casper knew to signify decision, and she went over to where Adrienne was seated.

"Miss d'Aulignac," she said with a kind of deference, "there are just a *few* friends I *do* want you to meet. Won't you—please?"

ADRIENNE rose, smiling in frank surprise. The Ambassador smiled also—not so frankly. "I have opened a door for the child," he thought, with a glow of professional pride, "if she cares to enter."

An hour later, when she and Ammiel were walking toward her boarding-place, she asked herself a similar question. Ammiel had taxed her with her silence. Hadn't she had a good time, he wondered.

She nodded. "Too good, perhaps." It was like him, she thought, not to press her for an explanation of that rather cryptic remark. More than ever she wanted to explain it. But she continued to walk in silence.

Hester's rather precipitous shift to cordiality was easily understood—by a woman. Ammiel, of course, would not understand it. Unless—perhaps—the Ambassador . . .

"Did you find the guest of honor interesting?" she asked suddenly.

"I only shook hands with him," answered Ammiel, unsuspecting. "Splendid-looking old chap!"

She relapsed into silence. Ammiel, the restless prober into motives, was singularly obtuse in some respects. Well, that was true of all save the feminine sort of man—and that sort she did not like. Sleek masqueraders!

"YOU'LL be able to quit counter-jumping pretty soon," offered Ammiel cheerfully, "if the Thorsen Condenser keeps on booming the way it is now."

"I shall be glad of that," she said with a frank smile. "I'm more than a little tired of millinery."

She was thoughtful. She had enough wit and charm and prestige—the last enhanced by those who took her up—to last indefinitely. For livelihood, there were sinecures to be had. And while she reposed thus among the lotus flowers, there was opportunity for the leisured stalking of the quarry who would make the comfort and security of this life permanent. There would be no need for hurry. She might, indeed, wait until she found a man she could love with her heart as well as her head.

She gave a quick glance of appraisal at the young man beside her. Of Ammiel's resources she knew little. He had plunged a not inconsiderable sum into their common venture with the nonchalance of one who has much. Clem Thorsen spoke often of the affluence of the Spottswoods. And certainly the Blandings gave no evidence of impoverishment. Why, she reflected with the cool realism of her Gallic blood, need she look further than the Spottswoods? Under that name was the security and peace she sought, relief forever from the drearily unequal struggle for mere existence in a world which men had created and operated for men, and in which a woman had no business to be. Of only one thing was she uncertain. One could never be certain of Ammiel. She turned to him, her eyelids drooping shyly, and for no practical reason, put her hand lightly on his arm.

"It has been a very wonderful afternoon," she said softly.

"It was a nice party," he agreed.

"It—it wasn't the party." That, she felt, was crude. But she was yet to meet the man to whom flattery could be too crude.

His reply was unexpected. "You have an odd face," he said thoughtfully. She could not be sure he had even noticed the flag she had raised. "Your mouth makes one think you're just ready for a smile. But your eyes—you have *sad* eyes, Adrienne."

Next to vanity, no emotion in man is more easily roused than his sense of protection. "There have been shadows in my life," she murmured wistfully.

He refused that signal also. "Those scars you will keep, I suppose. But I wasn't thinking of sad memories. I was thinking of *now*. I don't think you're very happy, Adrienne."

They were at their destination. A long flight of steps led steeply to the old-fashioned second-story entrance of the boarding-house. And beyond—she shivered—boiled mutton, on thick china with chipped edges. The garrulous intimacy of strangers. And at the day's end, the flight to a little cell, always cold, where, under the greenish inadequacy of a gas-light, one read and tried to forget in the glamour of "The Spanish Jade," that there was presently a sorrow at Spiegel Kleins.

"No," she whispered, and the tears in her eyes were involuntary. "I am not happy."

He studied her, in that impersonal way of his that at once intrigued and irritated her. Then he looked at the gray front of the boarding-house. From the dining-room downstairs came the clatter of crockery, and a burst of shrill laughter.

"My sister Sarah," he said with seeming irrelevance, "is keen for getting a job. She talks about being independent. Funny, isn't it? Wherever we are, it's some other place we want to be."

"What makes you think that of me?" Like a snuffer on a candle, the conviction was settling upon her that this strange lad was immune to her assaults.

"I guess we're all alike, aren't we?"

She held out her hand. "Good night, Ammiel." She took a step upward. Then she hesitated. "No, dear boy—we aren't. You—you're different from anybody in the world."

He was silent, and the dusk, obscuring his features, kept her from seeing his expression. "I used to think that myself," he said presently, in a voice that rather puzzled her. "I—I'm rather beginning to doubt it."

The tone, rather than the words, aroused her curiosity. She was conscious that he was breathing hard. But she was hardly prepared when his hand stole out of the darkness, groping for hers.

"Love," he said, in his slow, speculative way. "I've always thought that love was not for me."

"Have you, then, never been in love?"

"No, never. That's why—"

"Yes?" She strove to put banter in the monosyllable—and failed completely. "Do—do go on."

His hand had found hers, holding it without pressure, as a child's might. "I was merely wondering," he said gravely. Then a thin pipe of a laugh escaped him. "I—I feel the way I did when I was coming down with the flu!"

"And you think—perhaps—this time—it is love?" The question came from her against her will, in a whisper so faint she wondered if he could hear it.

"I—I feel very—unusual," he admitted. His hand held hers a little tighter. "Adrienne, come nearer to me."

Marveling, she complied. Suddenly she felt her wrist crushed in a grip that made her wince. "Ammiel!" she gasped. "Please!"

"Listen." Against the light from a street lamp, she saw him stiffen. "D'you hear it—the sirens!"

"But it's only a fire, somewhere," she protested.

He relaxed. "I know. But that sound—I can't hear it—anywhere—but I think of you. Why should that be so? Why—why should I think of you so much, Adrienne?"

"Do you think of me—so much?"

"I used to dream of you at night," he said quietly. "And in the daytime, too. I used to hear your voice. You have a very beautiful voice, Adrienne."

"Have I?"

He went on. "I dream of you by daylight, now. Why should that be, Adrienne? Is—d'you suppose that is love, Adrienne?"

She laughed gently. "Why, how should *I* know what love is like?"

"Then—*you* don't feel—unusual?"

Adrienne had but to press the hand which held hers—press it ever so lightly—and the sheltered peace of the Spottswoods was hers. This, being a woman, she knew. At a sigh, gentler than the falling of rose-petals, the fetters of poverty would drop from her. The lips of Prince Charming hovered near hers—his troubled breathing was like the jingling harness of the coach and four which waited to whisk her away to the grace and dignity of a sphere to which by blood she belonged.

It was the moment she had dreamed of, planned for, come close to hand.

The door above opened, and a whiff of stewing things stung her like a whip. She shuddered. Never in her life had she loathed anything so much as the thought of climbing those steep stairs and letting herself into the dim, odorous hallway. Never had she wanted anything so much as the secure arms of the gentle, kindly youth who stood waiting, so close that his breath fanned her cheek.

"Yes," she murmured, her voice choking. "I—I *do* feel unusual." Then, in a key unnaturally high, she laughed. "I feel more than usually hungry!"

Up the stairs she fled, tripping once, and so hearing the words he sent after her. "That's exactly what *I* said—after I first met you. But it wasn't that, Adrienne—it wasn't that!"

AMMIEL, seated at his desk in Bremling, Spottswood & Company, stared through the dusty window, considering life. It was, he decided, an enterprise drolly overrated.

He took up the letter from Jonas and read it again, with a deepening frown. Jonas was sleeping much better. Jonas was enjoying Pasadena so much. Jonas was using his irons with telling effect—had been in the high eighties more than once. Jonas was working hard at his painting—really thought he was getting somewhere with it. Jonas . . . made no mention of any plans for return.

"I didn't plant him out there for *life!*"

grumbled Ammiel. "I'm a pinch-hitter—not a regular."

He picked up another letter, the envelope bearing a Paris post-mark. It was a more or less facetious report of the Douglas Padgett Development Corporation. It mentioned that the General Manager and his assistant were living in the loveliest little villa near Chantilly. It referred to gay little dinners in the cafés on the Mount of Martyrs. It gave some studio gossip. It was full of optimism, and content rose from it like the scent of rose leaves. And Ammiel threw it down as if it were poisoned!

Life, he reflected, was getting tangled like a wet fish-net. Stephen's difficulties were still unsettled. Cecily, half hysterical, had suffered herself to be engineered into a trip East. But it was problematic what she would do on her return. She talked of divorce.

Sarah talked more and more definitely of her marriage to Destine. Ammiel, very carefully, had experimented in suggesting his disapproval. But two such experiments had shown him his helplessness. Sarah was infatuated with the idea of marrying into an association with what she called "interesting" people.

He had tried, also experimentally, to hint at the parlous state of affairs in Bremling-Spottswood, trusting that she would pass the information on to Destine. That worthy, he felt, might suffer a diminution of interest were he to learn that his affianced was living precariously on an insurance income derived from her father, and not on the swollen dividends of the supposedly prosperous Bremling, Spottswood & Company. But Sarah's ideas of finance were naïve at best, and she had lifted her dreaming eyes from the pages of the *Dial* only long enough to indicate polite apathy. And he was not yet ready to force comprehension of the truth.

OUTSIDE the family, business troubles swarmed like a harvest of dragons' teeth. As fast as he conquered one, a dozen rose in its place. Yet he was winning. The most pressing heritage of woe that Jonas had bequeathed him had been the conflict with the tax authorities. It had taken him a full month to grasp that problem. And he had never really solved it, though, by means which had evoked both the disgust and the admiration of Stephen, he had finally put a quietus upon it.

He had listened politely to the proposals of Jonas's lawyers for the disentanglement of the skein, asking only one question: "If we are wrong, we are wrong. And if we are right—*why* should we compromise?"

The answer to that had consumed the rest of the afternoon. At the end of the conference, during which he had been thinking earnestly, he rose and, to their complete discomfiture, said:

"Gentlemen, what you propose is quite obviously crooked. And since you are quite obviously honest men, you are no the men to carry out the proposals. For crooked work I should need a crooked lawyer."

This was accompanied by such a naïve and disarming smile that they could only cough in incredulous silence.

But he meant exactly what he said. In due course he obtained the kind of lawyer he sought, and presently, by means the details of which he was content to ignore, a final settlement of the matter was achieved.

"Jonas is saved," he said to Dr. Taplow in summary. "Crooked government, crooked lawyers, and Ammiel, crookeder than any of 'em. But—Jonas is saved. Let us rise and pray."

The second of Jonas's major woes, that concerning threatened prosecution for practices in restraint of trade, he settled much more easily. After several long legal conferences, in which, as before, he listened politely, understanding even less, he concluded that the shadow of the Federal Trade Commission was not unlike the shadow which fell athwart his desk at precisely eighteen minutes after four every afternoon.

"If that shadow ever jumps up and bites me," he told the astonished lawyers, "it will be time enough to rise up and howl. Meanwhile, let's go on about our business."

It was, however, easier to announce this policy than to follow it. Business, elusive under the best of circumstances, chose that year to shrink until it scarcely cast a shadow. Salesmen came in with long faces and longer explanations for the order books which bore no orders. Collectors returned with empty hands. Ammiel began to know his bank more intimately than most men know their clubs.

Crisis succeeded crisis. Following one of them, he wrote to Jonas that as salaries were being uniformly reduced, the California check would have to be somewhat smaller. Jonas merely acknowledged the receipt of the letter.

THOSE were long days and onerous for Ammiel. The fresh rose in his cheeks grew saffron, like the leaves of an old book. A settled weariness took the place of the twinkle in his eyes, and his mother spoke anxiously of exercise. To his mirror he wailed piteously. But in public the whimsical little droop to his lips grew straight, and to a gathering of department heads, he was grimly assured. "The squeeze can't last forever," he told them. "We may be pancakes before it stops, but I guess we'll hang on."

He surveyed his desk, recalling these troublous days. It was littered with letters, factory reports, charts and sales figures. Countless matters demanded his attention. But he leaned back, putting his feet on the desk, and lighted a cigarette.

"What's it all about?" he mused. "We'll weather it, of course. And what then? What difference does it make whether you're on your feet or off them?"

What idiots people were! The last man he talked with had been a book agent, who had burbled about his business future. The fellow had talked gravely, ponderously, earnestly, as if he really thought he were saying something. In a flash of irrelevance, Ammiel recalled a conversation with a French soldier—a typical *grognard*. The man had been very bitter about politics at home, the misconduct of the war in the field, the essential idiocy of war itself. He was quite through with the business, he insisted. He and his mates had had enough. They were *finis*. Mutiny? Certainly—why not? It was a rational man's duty to rebel against irrationality. First, of course, this little attack of the moment must be taken care of. But tomorrow . . .

So, thought Ammiel, it was with him. In due course, he would mutiny. Meanwhile—

His sterile reverie was ended by the entrance of his secretary with a card. "Mr. Slippak, of the Sico Corporation," he read from the pasteboard. "Never heard of him—he may be a buyer. Shoot him in."

Mr. Slippak, who proved to be a rather unctuous little man of middle age, came in smiling and rubbing his hands. "Mr. Spottswood, I'm *so* glad I found you in."

Ammiel decided that his guess was wrong—buyers were never so affable. "What are you selling, Mr. Slippak?" he inquired.

The little man's eyes beamed behind his spectacles. "I'm not a salesman. I'm—well, you might call me a sort of Santy Claus."

"Now I'm *sure* you're selling something," grinned Ammiel. "But it's a good start. Go on."

"Thanks. Have a cigar? No? All right, then, I'll smoke alone. No objections? All right. Well, here's my story. I'm just a plain business man. And I like to get mixed up with lawyers as little as possible."

"Check!" said Ammiel. "You're a man after my heart."

The little man nodded sagely. "Sometimes you gotta have a lawyer. But mostly not. So instead of having my lawyer talk to yours and getting things all balled up, I thought I'd just come out and have a chat with you myself."

"Very kind of you," murmured Ammiel guardedly. "And what about?"

"It's this condenser of yours."

"It isn't mine."

"Oh, I know all about that. But you're putting up the jack." Mr. Slippak was silent for a moment, seemingly intent upon his cigar. "How's it going?"

"Very well, thanks."

"So I heard. They say one of the big makers is dickering with you to put it on all his cars next spring."

"You heard right," admitted Ammiel, beginning to feel a certain annoyance. The fellow seemed to be implying that the Thorsen Condenser was not all it might be.

But his next words contradicted that. "It's a wonderful invention—that condenser," he observed, licking the wrapper of his cigar. "It'll revolutionize the industry. The fellow that thought it up deserves a lot o' money—and he's going to get it."

"I'm glad of that," said Ammiel. "She—the inventor needs it."

"You bet he does!" agreed Mr. Slippak heartily. "But he's not a hog, y'understand. He's willing to do the decent thing. He's the kind o' fellow will go a long way round to keep out of a fuss."

"You talk as if you knew the inventor

extraordinarily well," said Ammiel sarcastically.

"I do," laughed Mr. Slippak. "I'm him."

"You're him? What are you talking about?" Ammiel's mystification was complete.

Mr. Slippak laughed again in high good humor. It was evident that he was enjoying the situation thoroughly. "Well, it's like this, Spottswood. This condenser of yours is practically a dead ringer for one I patented two years ago."

"*You* patented?"

Mr. Slippak nodded complacently. "We weren't ready then to put it on the market—capital tied up in other lines. But we're ready now. And so, here's what we propose to do. We'll let you get back what you've put into this company of yours, plus a little something on the side, just to be good fellows, and—"

"Suppose we aren't keen for the idea," interrupted Ammiel coldly.

THE little man looked surprised and somewhat hurt. "Why, you haven't any choice! It's a clear case of infringement. We'd get out an injunction. Then we'd sue. Only, we wouldn't sue till you'd gotten successful, and then we'd get something out of you. Frankly, you aren't worth suing, now."

"Is that so?" countered Ammiel, belligerent because he did not know what else to be.

"Sure it's so. You can see that, can't you? Now then—what d'you say? Is it a deal?"

"Well—er—I've partners, you know," said Ammiel.

The little man nodded. "Sure. Gotta talk it over, o' course—though the man with the jack's the only one that counts. Well—" He took out his watch. "S'pose I come back at two. You have 'em here."

As if the matter were settled, he rose briskly, dusting the ashes from his coat, and before Ammiel could protest, he had gone.

The desk clock ticked busily. Minutes passed, while Ammiel sat staring gloomily at his grandfather's photograph on the farther wall. For one who had contemplated complete detachment from the affairs of life, he seemed to be getting deeper and more disappointingly into them. A sudden gleam of hope came into his eyes. Mr. Slippak might be persuaded to pay him double his investment in the Thorsen Condenser. That would put him back where he had started. Jonas could be recalled. Stephen could take care of his own troubles. Adrienne . . . The gleam faded. With a sigh of weariness he took up the telephone.

At a quarter before two, the owners of the Thorsen Condenser Company were in his office. "It looks as if the fire was out," he began. Then, gravely, he gave an account of Mr. Slippak's visit.

"Aw—bosh!" stormed Thorsen. "He's bluffin'. I know that bird. He's a smooth worker."

"I saw the drawings," said Ammiel gently. "There are differences, to be sure. But the idea's there—no question of it."

Adrienne listened in silence while Thorsen, in angry vehemence, expounded technical differences, and Ammiel, with patient monosyllables, strove for reason. Her emotions were mixed. On the one hand was sorrow and a wounded pride—somehow, the idea that her father had not been alone in his discovery was vaguely humiliating. The claims of this Slippak person affected her like an affront. She resented them. And the crashing of her dream of independence was a shock from which she was still numb.

On the other hand, it removed the last tangible obstacle to her taking up another course of life. Mrs. Blanding had already asked her to dine. Jack Baxter had taken her to a concert. The doors which the Ambassador had opened for her swung wide in invitation. The cage which silly sheltered women called independence was unlocked. She had tried her wings and found them adequate. She was prepared to soar.

Dimly, in the midst of these thoughts, she heard Ammiel's voice: "Adrienne—what do *you* think?"

Before she could reply, Mr. Slippak was announced.

He came in as before, beaming, rubbing his hands. "Now then," he said jovially, when the introductions had been made, "don't look so gloomy. I'm a good fellow—lots o' people call me a sucker. I'm here to do the right thing."

Thorsen, scowling in his corner, jerked out a question. "If our patent ain't any good, why do you want to buy us out, eh?"

"Because," answered Mr. Slippak imperturbably, "I'd rather pay you than pay lawyers to make you pay me. It'll be cheaper. That's good business, ain't it?"

"Lemme see your drawings," growled Thorsen.

"Sure," agreed Mr. Slippak, snapping the band from a roll of blueprints.

Ammiel tried to look severe. "I think it's time to be definite, Mr. Slippak. Just what is your proposition?"

The little man, in reply, took a legal envelope from his pocket, and from it a folded document which crackled crisply. "Sign this," he said, spreading it on the desk with a brisk flourish. "An' I'll give you this check."

"And if we refuse?"

"I'll make you look like a pile o' tissue-paper after a rainstorm," said Mr. Slippak cheerfully.

The check which he had laid under Ammiel's eyes was for ten thousand dollars. Ammiel handed it to Adrienne, who in turn passed it to the glowering Thorsen. "Well—shall we accept it?"

"No!" roared Thorsen.

"I—I think we should investigate," faltered Adrienne.

Mr. Slippak looked surprised. "But the check's certified, ma'am."

"She means the whole proposition," explained Ammiel. "You're asking us to take your word for a lot, you know."

With a tolerant smile Mr. Slippak held out his hand for the check. "I see. Well, maybe the lady's right. Go ahead an' investigate. Any particular references? Though I must say, *I've* always thought a certified check was about the best reference you could get. Still—"

"I—I'm sorry," faltered Ammiel, as he saw the bit of blue paper vanish into Mr. Slippak's pocket.

The latter nodded. "It's your money," he said briefly.

ADRIENNE, who had been listening, not very attentively, to the discussion, started at Mr. Slippak's words. They put a point to the matter. Why had Ammiel gone into the venture at all—if not for her sake? And why did he hesitate at getting out, on such favorable terms, if not for the same reason? Thorsen, in despair, was mumbling insulting reflections upon Mr. Slippak's character and ancestry. But intuitively she felt that Mr. Slippak, to the degree permissible in business, was quite straightforward. And Thorsen's optimism, she suspected, was not altogether well founded. He had talked unceasingly, of large orders—but they had never passed the talking stage.

Mr. Slippak seemed to have read her thoughts. "You haven't a chance," he said dispassionately. "That thing can't be put over on the capital you've got in it. Maybe you can get some big orders—but you can't fill 'em if you do. And you'll never have a money-maker till you get the consumer demand. That means advertising, and—"

"I understand," said Adrienne. Suddenly the utter futility of their project seemed clear to her. Ammiel had recognized its futility when he came into it. His investment had been a gift to her—nothing more.

"Mr. Slippak," she said evenly, "it is true that, financially, Mr. Spottswood's interest is paramount. But sentimentally—shall we say?—my interest is greater than his. This invention was the dream of my father's life. In relinquishing hope of its success, I—"

"But he's bluffing, I tell you, Marie!" wailed Thorsen.

Mr. Slippak, halfway to the door, turned and sat down again. "Go on, ma'am. It looks as if *you* could see sense."

Ammiel, too, had been thinking. He, also, had long had misgivings over the Thorsen Condenser. Acceptance of Slippak's check seemed to be the most rational way out of a hopeless predicament. And yet, there was something about the little man's smooth complacency that roused altogether irrational emotions in himself.

"I understand," Slippak was saying sympathetically. "But business is business, ma'am."

The old phrase snapped something in Ammiel's mind, and contradictions, all tangled and obscure, suddenly flattened out in clear conviction. "It isn't anything of the sort," he said bluntly, astonished at the resolution in his voice. "It looks as if you had four aces, Slippak. But please observe, I say, it *looks* that way."

The little man's eyes widened behind his glasses. "Yes? Yes? Just what did you —er—mean?"

Adrienne, too, was puzzled by the sudden change in Ammiel's manner. "Don't you think," she began, "we—"

He checked her with a gesture. "When the Germans in front of Rheims asked the French to surrender, the reply was that when they'd drunk up all the champagne in the region, they'd consider the matter. Well, Mr. Slippak—when we run out of money, we'll come to you. Meanwhile—"

"You mean—you won't settle?"

"Mr. Slippak," said Ammiel slowly, "you spoke of our making an investigation of you. Well, we're going to. When a man says he can knock you down, the best way to find out if he's right is to let him try it."

"YOU—you're going to fight?" gasped Slippak incredulously.

Ammiel nodded. "We've only just begun, as they say in the storybooks."

"Hooray!" Thorsen sprang from his chair and seized Ammiel's hand. "That's the stuff, Spotty! Boy—you're there!"

"I hope you don't regret it," said Mr. Slippak with some asperity as he gathered up his blueprints. "Of course, if you change your mind within a reasonable time, I'll be glad to talk to you."

"I'm sure we're all very grateful," murmured Ammiel, inclining his head. "Meanwhile, I'd suggest you turn on the juice. Because, if you don't turn us into wet tissue-paper, we'll turn you."

Mr. Slippak, his eyes blinking, hesitated a moment. Then he coughed and began to edge apprehensively toward the door.

When he had gone, Ammiel turned to his partners. "I appear to have started something;" he said doubtfully. Then he chuckled. "Mr. Slippak plainly thought me out of my head. I—I wonder if I am."

No one spoke. Finally Thorsen rose. "Well, if we're going to give that guy a battle we'd better be starting." The jauntiness with which he spoke seemed somewhat forced.

Adrienne rose also. "I—I'd better be getting back to the store," she said uncertainly.

Ammiel fingered the papers on his desk. "I have plenty to do myself. Let's call the meeting adjourned."

When his partners had gone he did not immediately occupy himself with the duties at hand. Instead, he continued to stare pensively out of the window. What a sorry Ajax he was, defying the lightning in the person of Mr. Slippak! The outcome was inevitable. It would be the ultimate irony that, in his desire to help Adrienne, he should merely succeed in making himself ridiculous. He sighed.

The sound covered the gentle opening of the door. It was not until he heard his name that he realized he was no longer alone. He looked up, startled. "Adrienne? Why—"

She nodded. "I had to come back. Things weren't settled."

"Not settled? Of course they were."

"No. Ammiel, you have no confidence in this thing."

"No confidence? Why, of course I have! I—"

"No, you haven't. I can tell. Why did you refuse Slippak's offer?"

"He—he was bluffing," said Ammiel helplessly.

She shook her head. "He wasn't. You *knew* he wasn't."

"But—"

"Don't interrupt, please. I understand, Ammiel. You did it for me—just as you went into it in the first place. But I don't think I'm going to let you."

"Nonsense! It's a business proposition!"

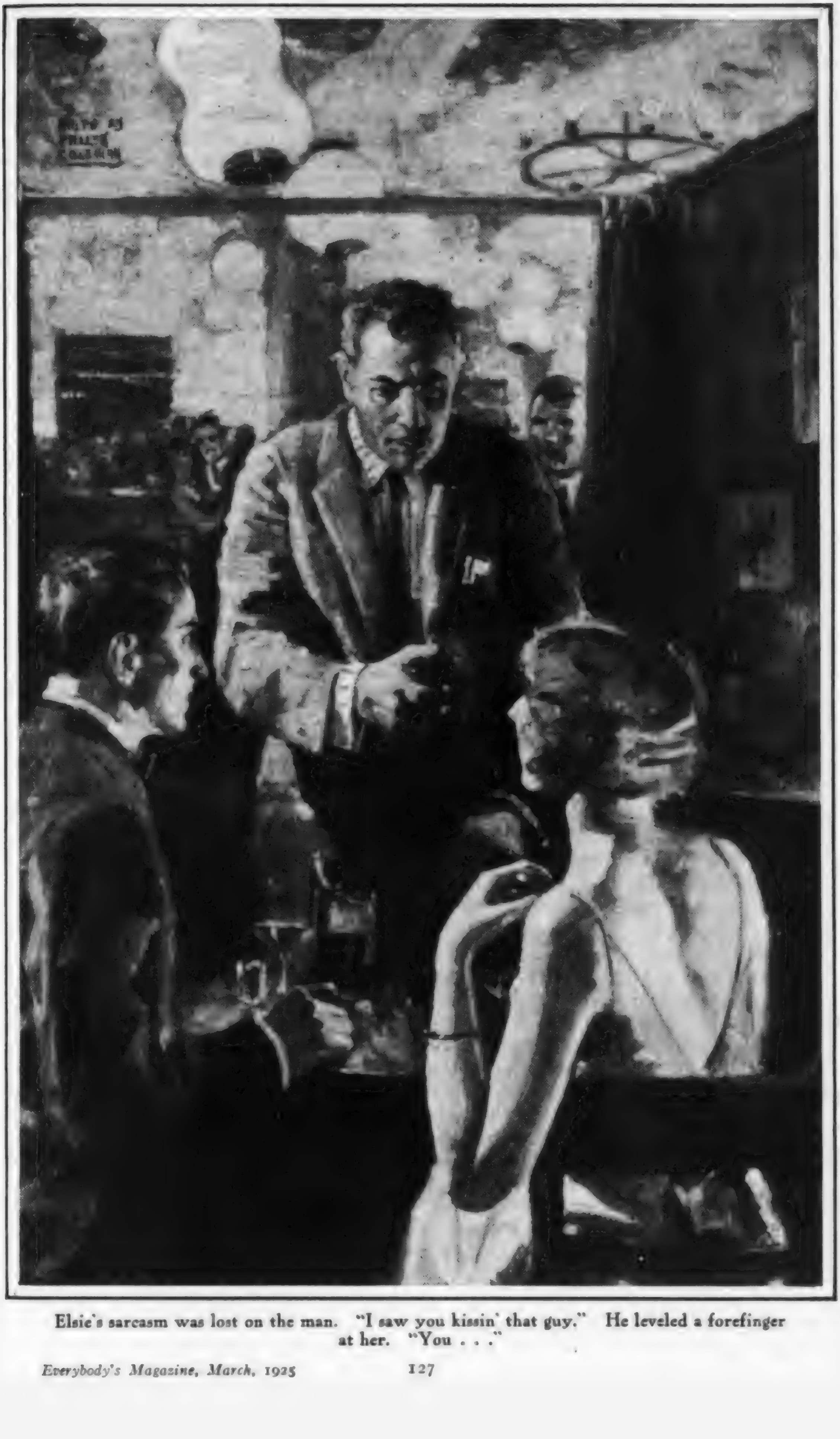
She smiled at that. "Then you're a very poor business man—just as poor as you are lovable."

Ammiel shrugged his shoulders. "I'm a very poor liar, too. It's true—I never was very deeply interested in the Thorsen Condenser. But I wanted to do what I could for you. And that seemed the way."

HE SPOKE with such wistfulness that Adrienne had to wink for a moment against a disconcerting mist of tears. "I'm not worth it," she said brusquely. I—"

He sprang from his chair and seized her hand. "A straight line is the shortest distance between two points! I don't give a *damn* for the Thorsen Condenser. But I'm in love with you. I'd ask you to marry me, except that I haven't any shadow of right to do that. But I—"

She interrupted him, freeing her hand. "Don't, Ammiel, please!"



Elsie's sarcasm was lost on the man. "I saw you kissin' that guy." He leveled a forefinger at her. "You . . ."

"I'm sorry. I knew I shouldn't. I am not worth—*anything*. I'm a dud."

"If you were, I think I'd marry you straight off," she exclaimed with a fervency he did not understand. "But you aren't! And so—you're safe!"

Before he could ask her what she meant by that, the door opened again. On the threshold stood the bony figure of Clem Thorsen, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his eyes surveying them with chill inquiry.

Ammiel was the first to speak. "It would have been better manners to knock."

Thorsen paid no heed. His gaze was fixed on Adrienne. "You told me you were going back to the store."

"And you didn't believe me?"

He nodded. "I followed you."

Her gaze answered his for a moment, an angry color deepening in her cheeks. Then she bowed in ironic deference. "I suppose I should be very grateful. But—I'm not." Before he could speak again, she had swept by him and out of the office.

"Well?" There was more inquiry than anger in Ammiel's voice—he was too astonished for anger.

Thorsen made no reply. He stared for a moment at the doorway through which Adrienne had just passed. Then he turned sharply to Ammiel. His face twitched. "I—I—" he began hoarsely, and stopped, unable to go on. His sallow skin had reddened, and a pale fire glimmered in his slate-colored eyes. "I—I—" he tried again. And then, with a curse smothered deep in his throat, he bolted from the room.

Ammiel, overcome with awe and amazement, sank into his chair. He had seen anger in men's eyes, the mad anger of the animal. And he had seen fear. But this was the first time he had seen jealousy. It was more nerve-shaking than either of the others.

JEAN SPOTTSWOOD sat fingering the letter from Ammiel. Jonas had opened it, but in his haste to get off to his work, had left it unread. For a long time she considered it, alternately gazing at the hot sunshine dancing on the flagstones of the patio, and the cool green quiet of the vines on the wall beyond. And then she did what she had never done in her life before—took out the letter and read it.

She was quite aware of the significance of the act, and her fingers trembled a little. It was the first time in fourteen years of married life that she had deliberately interfered with her husband's affairs.

She did not understand the part of the letter which spoke, in detail, of business difficulties; but that which specified the necessity of cutting Jonas' salary was clear enough. It was a well-written letter. It made polite inquiry as to the state of Jonas's health, and urged—not quite so politely—as early a return to his business as was feasible.

For a long time she sat with her eyes fixed upon the letter; as if it were a mirror, she seemed to see herself, in retrospect. It was a contented life upon which she looked, but a drab one. Her young dreams of romance had slowly bleached in a satisfying but colorless reality, her personality merged resignedly in that of her husband, her interests fenced by the narrowing concerns of domesticity and the training of their three children. Osiris, the cat, stirred suggestively at her feet. She was not, she decided, essentially far removed from that amiable creature, to whom life was a matter of eating and sleeping and the increase of its kind.

Jonas was satisfied with her. The children were satisfied with her. People at large were satisfied with her. She was a good wife, a good mother. They would be hard put, she reflected calmly, to think of anything else to say. She was, in short, an institution, a condition—she, *herself*, had ceased to exist.

In the patio a thrush was singing his exquisite and purposeless song. Jean put the letter back in its envelope and stuffed her sewing into an already overcrowded basket. Then she went in search of Jonas.

She knew where he was. At one end of their little garden was a doorway pierced in the pink stucco wall, and he had been trying for days, she knew, to record on canvas the contrast between the pulsing sunshine on the wall and the steady, translucent shadows in the doorway.

He was there, sitting on a camp stool, his head cocked to one side as if in perplexity, a brush poised in one hand. She halted for a moment, smiling tenderly. It was a smile full of understanding, and it made beautiful a rather ordinary face. Not so long ago, she reflected, the sight of Jonas's broad back bent low over a palette, the while he struggled to make its colors obey the bidding of his thoughts, would have made her smile in derision if not in anxiety. In those days, also, she would have seen only a doorway cut in a wall, so that ashes and garbage might be conveniently removed to the alley beyond. She would never have seen—as she saw now—light and color: stern, opulent purples, and glowing rose, and greens that sang like a forest at dawn, and that knife-edge, neither black nor white, which cuts the incandescent sunlight from the chill blue shadows of the tropics.

In a few short months life had somehow gone the way of that garden wall. No longer was it solid and inert. It glittered with the mystery of a forest pool in the moonlight, and its color was luscious and changing, like the plumage of a bird. She had a curious sense of movement, as one asleep in a ship hears the whisper of the passing waves, and though she could not express it, she understood that in movement lay the difference between life and its counterfeit.

IT WAS eleven o'clock, said a far-away bell, sternly. But Jonas, in a torn and shabby jacket and red morocco slippers more than half gone, was plainly oblivious. As he leaned over, a bit of his neck peeped from beneath his ancient straw hat—a bit of bronze that tempted her.

She crept up behind him, and yielded to the temptation. He leaned back with a tired little sigh, and caught her hand. "Well, mother—what d'you think of it?"

"I think it's wonderful," she answered quickly. "But don't call me 'mother'—ever."

"But you haven't seen it," he protested, drawing her toward the canvas. "I think it's better, don't you? Of course the sky isn't right. Nowhere near. Too muddy. It isn't—luminous—like that Gorter we have at home."

"Home? You speak, my dear, as if it were far away. Isn't home where the heart is?"

He turned, looking up at her curiously. "Why, Jean! What's the matter?"

She evaded the question with a little laugh, and dropped on the grass beside him. "Aren't you going to put that lizard in? He's sat for you so patiently."

"What do you think—really?" asked Jonas earnestly. "Think it shows any improvement—progress? Norman was over this morning, and he said it did. But then—he's such a gusher."

SHE was silent for a moment. "It's not very good, darling," she said hesitantly. "The sky *is* muddy. And"—she squinted judicially at the canvas—"those cracks don't *look* like cracks. They're just black lines. But—it's much better than your last one."

"Honestly?" There was a boyish anxiety in his tone that brought a lump to her throat.

She nodded. "You're doing better all the time."

"That's what counts," he cried gleefully. "By George, I think so myself! And I'm seeing better—I know I am. As Norman says, any ass can learn to draw, but it takes time, and patience, and work to learn to see. Why, Jean—dear girl, you're crying! What's the matter?"

"N-nothing," she faltered, taking out her handkerchief. "I—I was just th-thinking."

"Thinking of what?" He put his arm around her. "Tell the old man."

She leaned against him, her eyes closed. "I was thinking that back home—in the old days—you . . . Oh, Jo, dear, I'm happier than I ever have been!"

"Happy?" He surveyed her doubtfully. "But—you're *crying!*"

"That's a way women have," she laughed. "And I can't blame you for not understanding. I've only just begun to understand, myself. Oh, Jo! Old stupid, don't you see what it does to me when you ask what I think of your pictures? You never used to ask me anything. You'd dash off in the morning, and you'd come home at night so tired I never dared ask you anything.

"At first I used to feel sad—about the way things were going with us. Then I decided that was just the way life was. The man works and provides. The woman takes care of his home. That is all. But we grew to be such strangers. I never knew anything about you. And I don't think you—you knew much about me, did you, Jo? Just kind of took me for granted, didn't you?"

The question silenced him for a moment. But he answered it truthfully. "I guess I did," he said, his head hanging.

"But it wasn't your fault, dear," she went on. "Not more than mine. We just somehow got switched on to separate tracks—and when you got away from me, you ran so fast, you had a smash-up."

"It's been wonderful out here," said Jonas thoughtfully. "Would you like to live here, Jean?"

"Here?" She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't care where we live—here, or Alaska, or the South Seas, or back home. It doesn't matter. It isn't where we live—but how. Oh, dearest—we mustn't ever go back to just being married! I want to go on—this way."

JONAS was silent, staring at the picture on the easel before him. "It's a pretty punk job, really," he muttered. "Sometimes I get so discouraged—I just can't seem to get it. And then I get disgusted with myself. Only this morning I made up my mind to—to chuck all this. I'm as fit as I'll ever be. I ought to be getting back. I—I guess you've been pretty disgusted with me, too, haven't you? Just loafing around, and—"

She checked the words trembling on her lips, and instead, handed him Ammiel's letter. "I don't think you read this, did you?"

"No. I didn't want to. Well—" He took it from her and read it, with a deepening frown. He leaned forward, chin in hand. "That seems to settle it," he muttered dully. "Shall I read it to you?"

She shook her head. "I—I've read it."

"You've read it? Why?"

Her eyes met his without flinching. "Do you—object?"

His expression, for a moment, was stern and troubled. "You never did that before." Then abruptly, the corners of his mouth rose. "But we're doing a lot of things we never did before, aren't we! Well, what do you think of it?"

"The letter was written to you."

He nodded, ruefully. "So it was. And I've got to answer it. Well—"

"Is your mind made up, dear?"

The smile deepened on Jonas's lips. "That is a provocative question. You know perfectly well it isn't." He rose, stretching his arms in an embrace that took in the little garden. "I ought to go back—no doubt of that. But the thought of trading *this* for a desk and street-cars and tax returns and—well, it—it unnerves me!"

She was relentless. "Still, it's a thought you have to face, don't you?"

He hung his head, not answering that.

She, too, was silent for a little while. Then, almost in soliloquy, she began to voice the thoughts which had been taking form ever since the shock of her husband's breakdown had jarred her from her comfortable lethargy. "It seems to me, dear, that we ought to look our future squarely in the eye. (It gave her a delicious pleasure to say "we" and "our.") "Tell me, how are we fixed—financially? It struck me the other day—not very pleasantly—that I didn't know a thing, really, about your affairs."

He hesitated. Long years of reticence were not easily overcome. But something in her eyes—a curiosity fully roused, resistless—impelled candor. "I have my salary. And my interest in the business."

"Is that all?"

AGAIN he hesitated. Like many men—most, perhaps—he was reluctant to confess affluence to his wife. It was instinctive, a heritage from primitive forbears who had hidden their possessions from greedy and envious deities. But there was no defense against the eager, penetrating light in Jean's eyes, and he knew it. "Well—I've put a little aside."

"Enough to live on?"

"Oh, no!" he said quickly. "Goodness, no!"

"Wait!" There was a strange new note of command in her voice. "I don't mean that sort of living—a house on Astor Street, and two cars, and private schools for the children, and a lot of clubs."

"What *do* you mean, then?"

She switched abruptly. "Tell me, Jo: do you care more for the house at home than this one? Isn't the flivver—and your horse—more fun than the two cars? And aren't the children doing as well here as they did back East?"

"California seems to have gotten you, old girl," he laughed. "You talk like a Chamber of Commerce!"

"But it isn't California," she cried. "It—it's bigger than that. It—oh, it just seems as if you've been working at things you didn't care for, to make the money for things you didn't want. And that seems—well, just silly!"

"The way you put it, it does," he agreed, chuckling.

"And I," she exclaimed with unexpected vehemence, "I'd rather have you puttering around in that perfectly filthy old jacket, making perfectly hopeless pictures, and asking me what I thought of them—whenever I could spare the time from doing the washing—than have twenty cars and an allowance and be nothing to you but 'mother.' That's how *I* feel!"

He surveyed her curiously. "You—you're altogether astonishing, my dear!"

"Look here." She took one of his pencils and a bit of drawing paper. "With what you've saved, and your interest in the business, and what I have, we can handle this matter of living very well indeed. We'll have a lot more than the Normans—and do you know anybody who's solved the problem of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness better than they have?"

"But I couldn't live on your money," objected Jonas.

"Well, then I won't go on living on yours. I mean, when I married you, I didn't give my heart and hand to a check-book. I wanted you—and I'm going to have you. Do you understand, dear? Your dutiful, vegetable wife is recently deceased. You have a new one—and she's going to rule you with a rod of iron."

"But, my dear girl, think of the business!"

"I've thought of nothing else for fourteen years," said Jean grimly. "I'm through."

"Yes, but there's mother and the girls. If the business—"

"Ammiel seems to be managing it very well."

"But Ammie's just a boy. And he—"

"He's not just a boy. And anyway, if he can't make a success of the business, neither can you. See here, Jonas Spottswood: no one can make a success of anything if he hasn't his mind on it. You'll never get anywhere with Bremling-Spottswood because your mind will always be on your old paint-brushes. You—"

"Oh, come!" expostulated Jonas. "I—"

"No, you can't! You can sit up at your desk, looking as wise as an owl, and fool everybody but the gods. They know. And they'll punish you. They've given you a taste of it. People think you broke down from overwork. But you didn't. Nobody ever does. A person can go to pieces from doing too little. I don't think one ever does from doing too much. No, sir, it was—"

"Worry," he supplied.

"Just so. You were getting into all sorts of difficulties because you tried too hard. The more you thought about painting, the more you struggled with business. Just the way you play golf. The worse you get, the harder you try. And get worser and worser! And all the time you kept thinking: 'The years are going, and I'm no nearer to what I want.' Isn't that true?"

"Yes," he said softly. "That is true. But there's still the question of duty. You've overlooked that."

"Your first duty," answered Jean sternly, "is to me and your children. You've shirked it long enough."

Jonas blinked. "People would say I'd gone crazy and no mistake."

His wife rose and went to him, putting her hand under his chin and raising it until his eyes met hers. "Jo, dear, we have talked for nearly an hour. Steadily—about nothing but you and me. If that means you're crazy, I pray God you'll stay crazy—for ever an' ever, amen! Now—I've got to see about luncheon. See if you can't take the mud out of that sky. And think about—things."

She kissed him lightly on the forehead. Then, with a little burst of enigmatic laughter, she jammed his hat over his eyes and fled toward the house.

IT HAD been a more than usually vexing day, and Ammiel, in slippers and dressing-gown, had settled himself in his room with a pipe and a book and a log fire which had likewise settled to a comfortable glow. The wind howled through the gutters and occasional gusts of rain beat angrily against the windows. It was a very nice night for indoors, he reflected. He closed his eyes in dreamy content. And then, very quickly, he opened them. Some one, downstairs, was calling him. He was wanted on the telephone.

Cursing a civilization which rested on telephones, he went below.

It was Stephen. "She—she just called me up," he said nervously. "She's at the Tavern. Wants me to come down. I—I think she's loaded. I tried to put her off, but she swore she'd have me on the front page tomorrow if I didn't come."

"More money?"

"Yes. And I told her I was through—absolutely."

"Good lad!"

"She swore—and rang off. What—what'll I do?" Stephen's voice sounded worried and uncertain. "She's capable of anything, you know. And just now—"

"I understand. Pop will go the weasel if she elects to get ugly." Ammiel paused, considering. "She's at the Tavern, eh? Well—leave it to me, old top. I'll see what I can do."

With a sigh, he hung up the receiver. "Damn! I'm getting annoyed with that girl." There was nothing he could do, of course. And it was such a wretched night. Still—poor old Steve! He tossed off his dressing-gown and put on his shoes. Stephen had no business getting him into his imbroglios. But since he had, there was, obviously, but one course to pursue.

He had never been in the Tavern. But he had heard of it, and he was not surprised to find its dim-lit interior as unsavory as its reputation. Around the edges of low-ceilinged rooms, thick with tobacco smoke, were tables, separated from each other by high-backed benches, forming, in effect, little alcoves.

It would be hard to find Elsie, he thought, as he picked his way through the jam of dancers in the middle of the floor. But a hand suddenly plucked his coat, and he found himself being led to a vacant table on the far side. Elsie's late partner started to follow, but at a sharp word from her, he slunk away.

"Have a drink?" she offered, indicating an array of bottles on the table. "Pretty good champagne. No? A' right. Take your choice." She poured herself a finger or two of whisky, and tossed it off with a grimace. "Ugh—awful! Well—where's Stevie?"

"He—he couldn't come."

"Tha's a lie. Well—who cares! He sent the jack?"

Ammiel studied her narrowly. Her feverish eyes, the flush in her cheeks, the way she slurred her words, were storm signals. And he had an idea of her volcanic temper. He wanted to temporize and equivocate. But she, even in this condition, was far too keen. It flashed upon him, intuitively, that anything but frankness would provoke an outburst of wrath.

"No—he didn't send it. And you might as well know he's not going to. You're all through with Steve, Elsie."

"Is tha' so!" Quite calmly she took a bit of ice from her glass and let it melt in her mouth. "I'm through with him, am I? Well—" Suddenly her nostrils flared like those of an angry cat, and she thrust her face up close to Ammiel's. "See here," she rasped. "I'm up against it. I'm flat. I've borrowed all over the lot. I gotta have some jack, see? If I can't get it one way, I'll get it another. There's a newspaper guy—"

Ammiel nodded. "I know. And a shyster lawyer?"

Her clenched fist came down on the table. "It'll be nuts for the papers. An' there's a fellow that isn't so keen on Steve's gettin' to Congress. Now then—what d'you say?"

Ammiel leaned back, his thumbs in his vest. "Just what I've said to him. He won't go to Congress. His wife will divorce him. The disgrace will probably kill his mother—if disgrace can kill. But he'll be a free man. He can start over."

"START over?" she sneered. "Why, I'll put him so far back of the line it'll take him the rest of his life getting up to scratch." She lit a cigarette and tossed the match away with a disdainful gesture. Then her tone changed. "What d'you think o' me, kid? Like to break my neck, I guess, eh?"

"I ought to want to," agreed Ammiel, with a smile. "But I don't. You're disagreeable enough, Heaven knows, and—".

"Tight as a tick!" she supplied, grinning.

"Perhaps. But—well, Steve's losing his head over you isn't altogether beyond my understanding."

"Psh! Lost his head—nothing! He never gave a damn for me. I just gave him what his wife didn't. If she'd had any sense, I wouldn't 'a' had a chance. I've seen her picture. Shucks—she's got me backed off the boards for looks. Say, d'you know why bad eggs like me get by? It's 'cause the good ones don't play their cards."

"You haven't much sympathy for her, have you?"

Elsie's eyes flashed. "Say, if I had a man, d'you think some other jane ud have a nice time gettin' him away from me? Think I'd lie down an' squeal for help?"

"No," laughed Ammiel, "I hardly think you would."

"Not much I wouldn't. If I want anything, I go after it. And when I get it I keep it till somebody that's got more on the ball than I have, takes it away from me."

"Is there anything you want—besides money?"

Her eyes narrowed. "What's *that* mean, eh?" she demanded. Then, to his utter amazement, the hard, bloodshot eyes suddenly filled with tears, and her head fell forward on her arms. "I know. Yes, I know, all right." Her hand groped for his and, finding it, clung fiercely. He understood—she was voicing gratitude and a plea which could not be expressed.

"I know men," she went on. "Pretty well. Two kinds: the kind that's peaches an' cream when they're after something; an' the kind that gives you the boot when they ain't. Take it from me, there aren't so many like you. I'm goin' to hell a' right. But damn me, you'll be there too—bringin' water!" She laughed shrilly, and taking out a little mirror, dabbed powder on her face. "Say, ain't I a sight!" The tears had burned little furrows in the color of her cheeks. "Gee, I'm gettin' maudlin! Well—le's have a lil drink!"

"You—you've had enough," said Ammiel doubtfully.

"I've had too much—but what of it?" With an unsteady hand she replenished her glass; as before, she tossed it off at a gulp. "Well, you'd better beat it, kiddo. The gang'll be stringin' back. No use meetin' them—they're worse'n me."

Ammiel looked at her without speaking. What a singular creature! Capable of such vivid, passionate malice, with such tenderness of spirit underlying it. Hard, she was, but not coarse-fibered, and with a baffling quality of charm that her vulgarity of speech, her bedizened cheeks, her relentless cruelty could not quite destroy. Life had not handled her gently. What, under different circumstances, might she not have been!

She seemed to sense his thought. "No chance!" She shook her head wearily. "There was one guy wanted to reform me—a Y. M. C. A. fellow he was—an' just about the worst I ever met! No—as long as my face and my figure last, I can make a living, I guess. An' then—well, you've seen 'em. The street's full of 'em. But maybe I'll have the nerve to quit the game before I get to that."

Gently, stirred to his heart by the fundamental honesty of the girl, he put his hand on hers. He had quite forgotten that she was preparing to cast a shadow over the lives of those dear to him. "If I—well, you know what I mean."

She nodded, a grateful smile on her carmine lips. "Lot's o' them have said that, kid. You're about the only one I ever believed really meant it." Suddenly, with a movement that upset a half-empty bottle of gin, and sent it crashing to the floor, she leaned over and kissed him.

ORDINARILY, the sound of breaking glass would have aroused no undue interest in the Tavern. But on this occasion it coincided with a pause in the music. Every one heard it, and their table was the focus for all eyes within range.

Ammiel leaned over to pick up the broken bottle. When he straightened, a man was standing at his side, scowling blackly. "What the hell you doin' here?" he demanded.

Elsie answered for him. "He's a friend o' mine, Feinberger. Say, you own this table, huh?"

Her sarcasm was lost on the man. "I saw you kissin' that guy." He leveled a stubby forefinger at her. "You . . . " His thick lips spouted a stream of epithets.

"What if I did?" She sprang to her feet, her eyes blazing. "You say another word, you fat Sheeny, an' I'll crack another bottle on your dome!"

"You're drunk!" stormed Feinberger. "Throwin' away good gin like that," he added mournfully. "Ain't you got no sense, Elsie?"

Her wrath rose as his abated. "Go chase yourself, Feinie," she snapped. "Go on, get out." She seized an empty whisky bottle and poised it menacingly. "I'll make your map look like a rotten tomato, unless—"

Feinberger raised his arms in a gesture of defense. But he did not retreat. Instead, he took a step forward. "None o' that!" he snarled, his thick lips drawn back over his teeth. "You try any funny stuff with me, an' I'll—"

Suddenly his right arm shot toward her. But it did not reach its mark. Another hand flashed from behind him, seizing his wrist, and a new voice spoke.

"You wouldn't hit a lady, would you, Feinberger?" it asked in cold irony.

The question came, Ammiel realized, from the man who had preceded him as Elsie's partner. He was slim-waisted but broad of shoulder, and though half a head shorter than Feinberger, the latter seemed helpless in his grasp. A fighter, guessed Ammiel, the surmise supported by the flattened nose and the round, close-cropped head.

Feinberger spun around, stumbling awkwardly against the table. "You—Sid! . . . Get out o' here!" he bellowed. "This ain't your party."

"I'm makin' it mine," answered the shorter man, a threatening glint in his deep-set eyes.

"Good God!" muttered Elsie to Ammiel. "Them two, again! Say, kid, beat it now," she whispered hoarsely. "Sid's just spoilin' for trouble. If Feinie should make a break—"

Feinberger finished the sentence for her. "I told you if I caught you hangin' round Elsie," he rasped gutturally. "I told you—" His hand flashed to his coat pocket.

But quicker, far, was the fist of the man they called Sid. Feinberger's hand dropped limply at his side. With a grunting cough he slipped sidewise from the table, and to the floor. He lay there inert, his cheeks blue-gray, as the blood left them.

The man who had hit him turned to Elsie. "Come on, girlie—le's get out o' here."

But she paid no heed. She was on her knees, holding the head of the prostrate Feinberger. "You knocked him cold," she said reproachfully. "You shouldn't 'a' done it, Sid."

"He had a Gat," answered the latter with complete indifference. "He'd 'a' plugged me."

"I wish to hell he had!" snapped Elsie venomously. And to the group of curious who had gathered around the table, she added: "Move on now, folks. An' don't bother about the flowers."

"Can't I help?" proffered Ammiel. He saw that Feinberger was bleeding from a cut on his cheek.

"You can beat it, I told you," she answered harshly, as she loosened the unconscious man's collar, and bathed his face with a handkerchief dipped in water. "Damn it all!" she added plaintively. "Feinie'll have it in for me for this. An' it isn't my fault if guys like Sid go crazy jealous. He ain't nothin' to me. But he won't believe it."

Her age-old lament for the pugnacity of man and his ridiculous jealousies, was interrupted by a muffled clamor from the front door. A waiter rushed in, shouting unintelligibly. Suddenly, the lights went out, and there was a scuffle of hurrying feet, to the accompaniment of clinking glassware and the crash of falling chairs. Ammiel heard Elsie curse vividly.

"I bumped my head," she wailed. "Who turned out the lights? What's up?"

SHE was quickly answered. The lights went on again. The room, recently so crowded, was all but empty. In one corner sat a man, sprawled against a table, face down, obviously too drunk to move. With him was a woman, protesting in tearful incoherence, quite unconscious that no one was listening.

Feinberger had regained consciousness, and was sitting up, his back against an overturned chair, rubbing his eyes sleepily. "Wha's matter?" he mumbled. "Wha's matter?"

"It's a raid," answered Elsie.

In the doorway, corroborating her, stood a policeman, his arms folded, regarding the disordered scene with bored complacence. Elsie strode toward him, her head tilted in defiance. But he put out his arms, barring the way, and grinned. She hesitated a moment. Then she shrugged her shoulders and went back to their table.

"Might as well finish up the booze," she observed nonchalantly, selecting a bottle. "Them bulls 'll get it anyhow. Here's to you, officer."

Worst of all, this mishap threatens to separate Ammiel from the girl he loves—in the next instalment of "The Phantom Caravan," in April EVERYBODY'S, out March 14

A Novelette

Hypostasia

A Psychologist Experiments in the Unknown Depths of Another Man's Mind, with Results Startling and Painful to Himself

By Ralph Barstow

Illustration by Harry T. Fisk

IT WAS not until Kirby died that I realized the impression he had made on me. His studies, his research, and his power, all gave one the feeling that he at least, would not be touched by death. His body was frail, but the mind was so competent, so masterful and so calm that it seemed as though it must dominate his physical existence.

The whole business was peculiar. No one knew that Kirby was ill, and the coroner was unwilling to accept Hodgkins's testimony until it had been corroborated by Dr. Blanchard and later by the autopsy.

Hodgkins was the last man with Kirby, and, according to his story, he left Kirby alive and apparently in good health. The people in the piano store practically never went near Kirby's quarters, and if it had not been for a milk bottle at the front door, the situation might have become very embarrassing.

It had been Kirby's custom to remove this evidence of domesticity before the store opened at eight o'clock in the morning, and the porter was puzzled to account for the presence of a bottle of milk on the doorstep.

"Must belong to Kirby," said the first salesman who came in. "I'll take it up to him."

In a few moments he came tearing down, white-faced.

"There's a dead man upstairs!"

Some one telephoned the police and the whole group went up to the top floor.

Kirby was lying, dressed, in a composed attitude on a couch, his eyes wide open and his whole face expressionless.

The police came, and finding no evidence of suicide, talked mysteriously of poisons, so the reporters made a good-sized mystery story for the noon edition.

"Mystery Shrouds Death of Famous Psychologist!" was the way they put it. From the cigar stubs and other evidence the police were sure that some one had spent the previous evening with Kirby, and at three o'clock Hodgkins appeared at headquarters.

"I called at about eight o'clock and left Kirby at eleven," he said. "Kirby said nothing about being ill and I didn't notice that anything was wrong with him. I had no business with him, but I often dropped in for a chat in the evening."

The story was so simple and so bald that the police hardly knew how to take it. The utter frankness of Hodgkins's evidence gave them nothing to work on, but they held him on general principles.

Late that evening, Dr. Blanchard reported at headquarters.

"I have known Mr. Kirby for a good many years," he said. "We made some studies together a long time ago. Yesterday, he called on me and said he wanted an examination. A man of his type has a predisposition to tuberculosis, so I went over him carefully. His lungs were all right but, to my surprise, I found a heart murmur—a

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big one—mitral valve—the kind of murmur a man may carry with him sixty years, or that may drop him any minute.

"I told him what I have just told you and he smiled quite cheerfully about it. I advised him what precautions to take and then gave him my blessing. Strange it should have happened so soon after—perhaps he had a premonition."

Hodgkins was held until after the autopsy, but the examination showed nothing irregular, and the coroner gave a certificate of death from natural causes.

Kirby left no will. Hodgkins and I obtained permission to look after his stuff and we went over it carefully. There were no relatives, his bank balance was inconsiderable, and his personal effects, outside of his psychological apparatus and his library, were practically valueless. We turned over the apparatus to Dr. Blanchard and the books to the Boston Public Library.

To my surprise we found no records and no writings. It would have seemed natural for a man like Kirby to record his researches from a sense of duty to his brother psychologists, and I mentioned this to Hodgkins.

To give you a picture of Kirby and thus show how he seized on my imagination and held me, I must tell you of our first meeting.

HODGKINS and I were walking down Boylston Street one night, past one of the piano show rooms, when he said suddenly:

"Wait a little, Manders, and maybe I can show you something."

He went over to the doorway and pushed a button.

"Who lives here?" I asked.

Hodgkins flattened his nose against the plate-glass door and answered with his back to me.

"Why, it's Kirby! Haven't you ever heard of him? He's a curio."

We saw a shadow approaching from the back of the store. Hodgkins introduced me to a man about thirty-eight years old, with a mass of thick black hair, a pear-shaped face coming to a focus at the chin, very brilliant black eyes, high cheek-bones, and a body of unusual slenderness.

"Manders and I were just walking downtown," Hodgkins added. "I thought that he ought to meet you, so I brought him in. He is up on all that occult stuff of yours."

We followed him to his quarters at the top of the building. There were two large rooms, simply furnished but comfortable. Large chairs and couches, a number of bookcases, and a few pictures. The man dominated the place. He had a magnetic personality—one that vibrated his individuality in a peculiar way. I remember wondering how so frail a body could endure so intense a nature.

After a few commonplaces, Kirby said politely, "Are you interested in the occult, Mr. Manders?"

"Yes," I replied, "but not to the extent that Hodgkins suggested. I can't say I know much about it. I don't believe the word can be defined."

"We agree on that then," Kirby smiled. "It is a bad word. It has fallen into disrepute."

We came to a standstill and Hodgkins was very much dissatisfied. He had brought me in to show off his friend and his friend wouldn't perform. He leaned forward in his chair, waved his arms and said:

"You know very well, Kirby, that you can do remarkable things. That library of yours is full of black art."

"Oh, nonsense! I have a few books on psychology and mental therapeutics."

"I should hardly call that occult," I ventured.

"No, it isn't," said Kirby; "but Hodgkins is generalizing."

"I'm not," persisted Hodgkins. "You've put up all sorts of tricks on people. You've hypnotized them!" And he sat back as though he had revealed a great secret.

Kirby laughed again.

"Do you hypnotize?" I asked.

"Oh, occasionally."

"That must be fascinating," I remarked.

"Yes, literally," agreed Kirby.

"Go on," put forth Hodgkins, "hypnotize Manders!"

I stiffened in my seat. All my instincts rebelled against such an idea.

"No," I said. "I don't want to be disobliging but it isn't in my line. You might hypnotize Hodge, if you like."

"No, Mr. Manders, I don't hypnotize people—not for the fun of it. It's all right to hypnotize for scientific purposes."

"Who's afraid?" said Hodgkins.

"I am for one," I admitted.

"Well, I'm not. Go ahead, Kirby—you

may hypnotize me." He waved his hand grandly.

"Very likely I can't hypnotize you," said Kirby. "You might not be one of the suggestible kind."

"You can't do it if I don't let you," said Hodgkins, "but I'm willing. Go on and try it."

Kirby leaned back in his chair and shook his head.

"If Hodge really doesn't care, I should dearly love to see it done," I said. "I have never had a chance to see a person hypnotized."

"You speak as if it were something wonderful," said Kirby. "As a matter of fact, it is very simple and not spectacular at all. It is largely mechanical, and if Hodge is really willing, I'll be glad to show you."

KIRBY got up and turned on a peculiarly arranged series of lights. He put Hodgkins in a chair facing these lights—strong electric lamps with very brilliant reflectors. Hodgkins sat very much as though he were about to be photographed. He beamed, his eyes sparkled with enjoyment at being the central figure of the performance.

Kirby left him in the chair and fussed around the room for perhaps five minutes.

Hodgkins grew impatient. "Come on," he said. "Aren't you going to do anything?"

"No hurry," answered Kirby.

Finally, he went over and turned out all the lights in the room except one directly behind Hodgkins. I was sitting so that the two were in profile to me. Kirby had a small bright object like a mirror in his hand. He held it up and said, "Look at this, Hodge."

Hodgkins complied.

The light of the lamp shone on the metal mirror and was reflected into Hodgkins's eyes. After a few minutes, Kirby said quietly:

"Now close your eyes."

Hodgkins did so.

Kirby took the mirror away, rubbed his hands down Hodgkins's forehead, turned around and lit all the lights. Then he sat down in his chair.

After a moment's silence, I cleared my throat, feeling I had permission to speak.

"What's the matter?" I said. "Couldn't you do it? Wouldn't it work?"

"Why, it's done!" said Kirby. "He is hypnotized."

"For God's sake, man, is he?" I asked, surprise and doubt in my tone.

"Yes, he's asleep. Not a very deep sleep, but sufficient. Now we can talk quietly."

"You mean that he doesn't hear us?"

"He doesn't hear a sound. Speak to him."

I turned around and said: "Open your eyes, Hodge. You can hear me, can't you?"

There was no reply.

"Hey, you idiot!" I shouted. "Can't you hear me?" Again no reply. "Quit your joking," I said, because I really felt that Hodgkins was putting up a joke on me.

Kirby discerned what was in my mind.

"No, he is not joking you. Go over and test him. Listen to his breath, pinch him, startle him."

I went over rather gingerly and took hold of Hodgkins's hand. He was normal but limp. I could feel that there was no muscular reaction to my grip. I put my ear to his mouth: his breath came regularly and quietly. I gave a resounding clap. Not the faintest sign from Hodge. I started to pinch him but drew back my hand a little shamefacedly.

"Go ahead, pinch him," said Kirby. "He can't feel it. Better yet, get a needle off my dresser and stick it into the fleshy part of his leg."

I went toward the dresser, and then suddenly a thought came to me. I turned to Kirby.

"You're sure you hypnotized Hodge?" I asked.

"Oh, he is hypnotized, all right," assured Kirby.

"But how about me?" I asked. "Did I get my feet wet, too?"

"Why, no! What makes you think so?" he inquired.

"I just noticed that I was doing all the things you told me."

"Oh, that's nothing!" he said. "That's merely your own interest. That's the beginning of suggestion, of course. You're fascinated with Hodge—your faculties are concentrated on him and his condition and you unconsciously receive and accept suggestions, but you would accept them from anybody. That may be a clue to hypnotism but it isn't hypnotism itself."

"I know what I want—to go and get the needle."

"Naturally you do, but you don't have to," he said. "If you were hypnotized, you wouldn't have any choice. If you wanted to now, couldn't you come over and sit down without getting that needle?"

I was a little dubious. I stood still a moment and thought.

"Darn it all, you're clever, Kirby!" I couldn't help saying. "You know very well that I want to make that test."

Kirby laughed outright. "My dear man, you're hypnotizing yourself," he said.

"No, I'm not," I said, and went back to my seat and sat down. "*You* go over and get *me* the needle. I don't know where it is."

Kirby was pleased. "That's a very good way out of the complication. Here's the needle." He handed it to me.

I jabbed it into the calf of my own leg first. I felt the sensation keenly and was satisfied that I was in my normal condition. Then I went over to Hodgkins, who sat as calm as an Egyptian statue. Expecting him to yell and jump at me, I jabbed in the needle and withdrew it quickly in order to get out of the way. But nothing happened. The silence was unbroken save by a chuckle from Kirby. I replaced the needle on the dresser and sat down.

"HOW long will he sit there like that?" I asked.

"For hours," Kirby replied.

"Marvelous!" I ejaculated. "What is it?"

"Nothing at all but sleep," said Kirby.

"But not regular sleep."

"It depends on your definition of regular sleep."

"I mean," I said, "that isn't the normal, natural sleep a man gets when he goes to bed."

"It is practically the same thing, only deeper. You see when a man sleeps in his bed, his faculties are dulled but they are not at rest. If you stand by a sleeper, you can startle him awake by a sudden noise—the brain is still receiving the sensations of sound. All the avenues of the senses are open in normal sleep. In hypnotic sleep the connection between the senses and the brain is practically inhibited. I say practically, because there is an exception. He can hear me and I can tell him to hear you—his power of choice is withdrawn.

"Oh, Hodge!" he called. "Open your eyes."

Hodgkins did so, but his eyes didn't focus on anything. They were not glassy; they were perfectly normal, but I had a feeling that he didn't see.

"Can he see?" I asked.

"I think he can, but only in a general sort of way." Then he added, "Point to Mr. Manders, Hodge."

Hodgkins looked slowly around, raised his head and pointed at me.

"Yes, I guess he can see," said Kirby. "Now find out if he can hear you, Mr. Manders."

"Hodge," I called, "will you let me take your knife?"

He made no move and did not answer me.

"No," said Kirby, "he doesn't hear you. Now watch."

He went over to Hodgkins and said, "You will obey Mr. Manders just as you do me." Then turning to me, he said, "Now speak to him."

I repeated my request. Hodge got up, felt in his trousers pocket and brought his knife over to me.

"You had better open it," I said.

He opened it and I took it and thanked him, expecting him to sit down again. But he remained standing in front of me.

"Go over and sit down; I want to sharpen a pencil."

He resumed his seat.

"Can he talk?" I asked Kirby.

"Yes, if you tell him to do so," answered Kirby.

"Do you hear me, Hodge?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Well, why don't you talk?" I asked.

Hodgkins said nothing in answer to this.

"That's queer," I remarked to Kirby.

"No, he can't talk because his conscious mind isn't thinking."

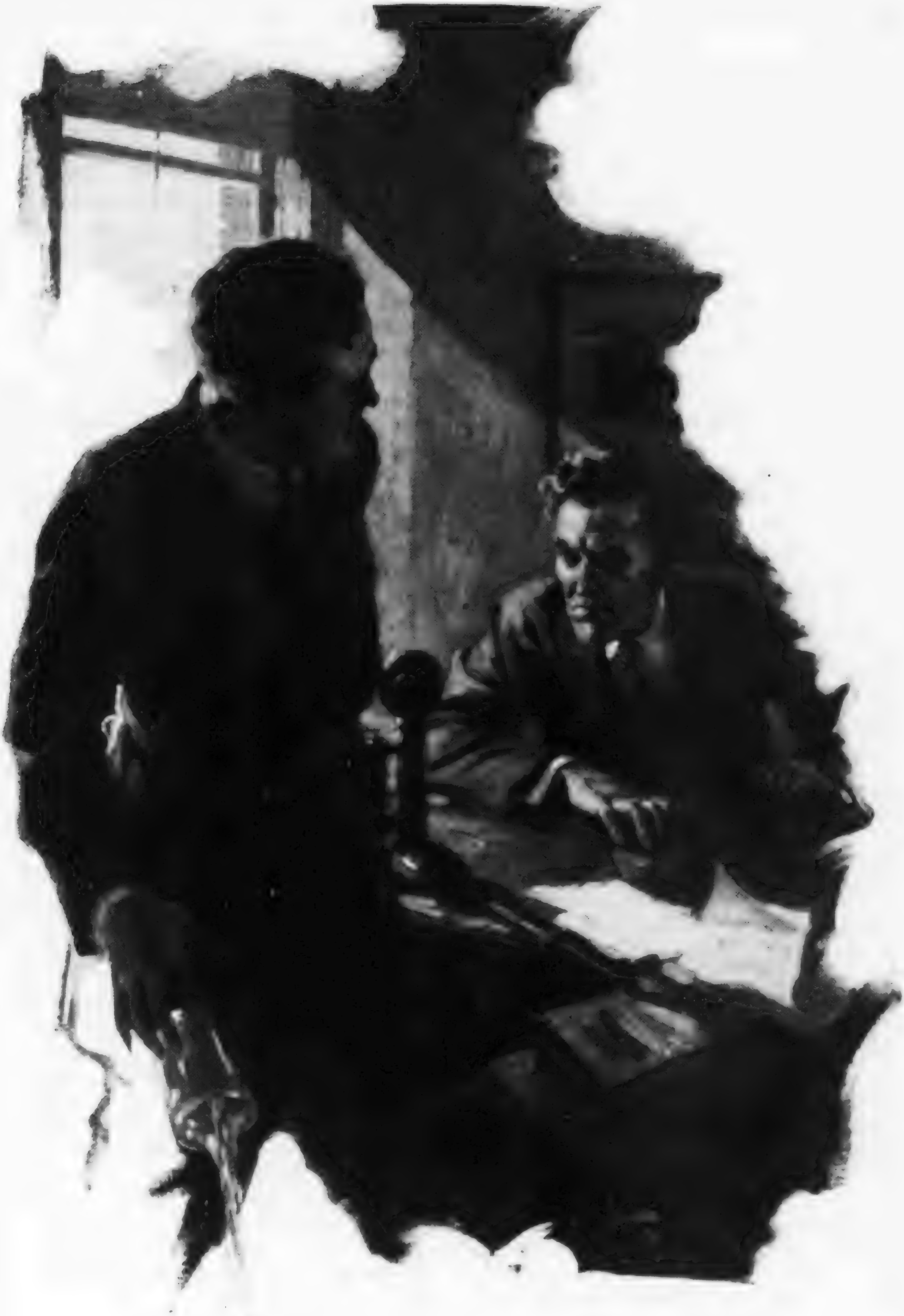
"Well, what's making him do all these things?" I asked.

"His subconscious mind," said Kirby.

"And yet you say he isn't thinking."

"Of course not; it is obeying."

I shook my head. "That's a strange thing," I said. "Do you mean to say you can give that man over to my charge and he will do whatever I tell him to do: that I can take him out of here, take him home; that



"You see, it's no use, Manders. I still have him under my control," said the man I had left asleep. The glass dropped from my hand.

he wouldn't talk, but that he would do all the things I told him to do?"

"Yes," answered Kirby calmly.

"Well now, I suppose this is just trick work and it is not practical."

"No, it isn't trick work and it is practical in its proper field. Take Hodge, for instance. You know that he has a weak head for liquor. Wouldn't he be better off if he didn't drink so much?"

"Most certainly," I replied.

"I'll tell you what I'll do then," he said quickly. "I'll fix Hodge so that he will never want more than two drinks."

He went over to Hodge. "Hodge," he said, "listen to me. After this when you go out of an evening or in fact, no matter where you are, you will never take more than two drinks of liquor of any kind. After you have had two drinks, you will say, 'No,' and you will refuse to drink anything more."

"You've told Hodge that he could never have but two drinks all his life. That is inhuman."

"So I did—so I did!" he said. "That wasn't what I meant, was it?" Turning to Hodge, he said: "This two-drink rule is two drinks a day, Hodge. At the beginning of the next day you may have two more, if you want them. But you may never have more than two drinks in any one day. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Hodge.

I made a mental note at this point. I planned to test this later.

"KIRBY," I said, "what would happen to Hodge if you died?"

"If you mean this minute," he said, "he would come right out of his trance."

"Would that command you have just given him hold after you were dead?"

"Ah, that's the great question, Mr. Manders! No one knows."

"As long as you live, will Hodge follow that order?"

"No, not exactly. The effect of that command will stay with him for some time. Just how long depends upon the positiveness with which I made it and the impressiveness with which he received it. Hodgkins should receive a repetition of it about twenty-one different times. Laboratory tests have been made and it has been found that the average person requires a repetition of the recognition of an idea twenty-one times in order to make it permanent."

"You mean you would have to tell me this thing twenty-one times for me to remember it permanently?" I asked incredulously.

"No, I mean you would have to recognize the idea twenty-one times in order to have it become permanent."

I looked at my watch. "It is very late. Call Hodge back and we will go home."

Kirby snapped his fingers in front of Hodgkins's face, and said, "Wake up!"

It was a study to watch Hodgkins's eyes. When Kirby said, "Wake up!" I could see them get into focus and light on me. The minute he recognized me, he laughed boisterously and said:

"Didn't I tell you he couldn't hypnotize me—my mind was too strong for him? I was playing a joke on him all the time. Kirby, you are a faker!"

"Do you mean you have been sitting there for the last half-hour fooling us?" I asked.

"Half-hour?" said Hodge, vacantly. "I have only been here for a few minutes!"

"Say, Hodge, did you ever try sticking a pin in your leg?"

"No, why?"

"Nothing—nothing at all," said Kirby and I together.

Presently Hodgkins and I went out into the night. The joke was a little involved. At first I had thought Hodgkins was fooling me into believing he was hypnotized, and now I was trying to figure out if he was fooling me into believing that he was not hypnotized. The weight of evidence was against him and I knew that he was fooling himself.

ABOUT a week after my first visit, I went again to see Kirby. As soon as I had recovered my breath after the climb up to his quarters I dived right into the subject I had on my mind.

"Kirby, are you a churchman?" I asked.

"No," he answered.

"Well, are you religious? I mean, have you a certain moral code in conformity with the teachings of some group or other?"

"As to that I cannot say—probably not, Manders. What are you driving at?"

"Kirby, if any man thinks over the demonstration of your power that you gave the other night on Hodgkins, he is forced almost immediately to one big question:

What right have you to take possession of the mind of another person?"

Kirby smiled. "That's simple," he said. "The right of ability."

"Ah, but you are too wise a man to believe that might makes right."

"Now, am I?" he queried. "Is it unwisdom to believe that might makes right, Manders? Mind you, I'm not saying that it *does*—I am asking you. How about the might of the wind, of the waters, of the old law of the survival of the fittest? Does not everything about you point to the fact that power justifies itself?"

"That's different, Kirby. I was considering morality—not justification."

Kirby shook his head.

"All right," I said, "let's go on another tack—although you have almost answered me by showing your point of view. We will admit for the sake of argument that possession of power justifies its use from a practical point of view. Don't you agree with me that there is a higher law than expediency—a moral law?"

"You are trying to show me that I have no right to hypnotize another person because that person's mind is like an Englishman's home—it is his castle."

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean," I said. "You have no right to enter Hodgkins's mind."

"Mr. Manders, when theoretical morality and actual facts clash, what happens? For instance, when you say we ought to have good government and people don't want it, what do they get?"

"Why, they get the kind of government they deserve."

"Well," he went on, "that same rule holds good everywhere. Hodge has a mind open to suggestion—his suggestibility is working all the time. The only difference between my effect on him and yours is that your suggestions are made to him unconsciously, and my suggestions are made consciously. If you are strong enough to resist suggestion, which you are not, then you are free from any control by another."

I confess that the man angered me. "Kirby, neither you nor any one else could hypnotize me, and I am prepared to prevent it with physical violence if need be. And furthermore, I can commence right now."

Kirby smiled deprecatingly. "Manders, your heat suggests fear. If you were sure of yourself, you could afford to be calmer."

"You are perfectly right," I said. "I am afraid; and because of that fear, I believe I am safer than if I were foolishly confident like Hodge."

"A point well made," agreed Kirby. "However, you misunderstood me. I didn't say I could hypnotize you. I said it was possible for you to be hypnotized by the use of certain instruments. By using one of the many machines, I can play upon one of your senses until I produce a hypnotic condition. You can frustrate this as long as you are on guard. But the minute you're off guard you become suggestible. I am not singling you out. I am laying down a rule that governs all people—that governs me. A man has no power in and of himself—his only power comes from using the natural laws about him.

"NOW, I don't feel," he went on after a pause, "that I am required to justify my position before you; but I have worked this matter out to my own satisfaction. Therefore, I am willing to place this reasoning at your disposal.

"The natural laws are the governing powers of this universe, including man. The simplest of these laws are birth, growth and decay, and there are subsidiaries of each of these laws. One of the laws of evolution is that every individual grows by receiving impressions, experiences and suggestions through the medium of his five physical senses. The impressions are retained in the brain. Do you feel that there is anything immoral in suggestion?"

"The morality or immorality of the suggestion is governed by its motive, its method and its results."

"Very well, I will grant your definition," said Kirby. "Suggestion may be moral or immoral—that right?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then unconscious suggestion may be either moral or immoral. And by the same line of reasoning conscious suggestion may be either moral or immoral."

"By the gods, Kirby," I broke out, "you ought to be a lawyer!"

"Not at all, Manders. We have agreed on certain definitions and by applying reason to those definitions, not by me, but by the facts themselves, you are forced to agree with me. Because I am fit to apply logic to the situation, am I immoral therefore?"

"No," I admitted.

"Considering conscious suggestion and hypnotism to be one and the same thing—do you?"

"Practically," I said, making a mental reservation.

"Then conscious suggestion, when it is made with a good motive at the proper time and for good results, is not immoral, is it?"

"No, damn you," I said, half smiling.

"Furthermore, I am not responsible for the existence of the law of suggestion, am I?"

"No."

"Provided I know of the existence of the law of suggestion and acquaint myself with the methods of the application of this law, I am doing nothing immoral, am I?"

Kirby stood up and smiled. "Checkmate, Manders."

I stood up and scowled. "Your reasoning is ingenious and fiendish. I am forced to admit the logic of your statement but I will tell you one thing, Kirby, that is above logic, that you cannot reason away and I cannot give my reasons for; yet it is truth, none the less."

"That sounds like an intuition. What is it?"

I thumped on the table for greater impressiveness. "There is a limit to your ability, or that of any other man, to use this law of suggestion. A higher law will catch you and put you in the dump heap. And I tell you now, you'll live to see your own reasoning proved *futile*."

I left him abruptly, for my temper was rising; and I never saw him again.

THERE was a change in Hodgkins after Kirby died. I did not detect it in the beginning, although it was on my mind to see if he still observed the rule forbidding him more than two drinks in any one day. In fact, I think that focused my attention on the change in Hodgkins.

Dr. Blanchard, Hodgkins and I were having dinner one evening at my place and it came over me suddenly that Hodgkins was laying into the liquor pretty strong, so I taxed him with it.

"You have exceeded your quota, haven't you?"

"Well, why shouldn't I?" he asked.

"No reason why you shouldn't, only you haven't been doing it for months."

"Oh, that's all right—I can when I please, and stop when I wish," he laughed, a bit uneasily. I had to admit to myself that he carried his liquor better than formerly, however.

The incident was too slight to make much of an impression and I forgot it for the time being.

Month by month, Hodgkins prospered amazingly in his business. Prior to Kirby's death, he had just made a living, but the first thing I knew, he had an automobile and showed other signs of prosperity. I found myself objecting to an air of smugness and self-satisfaction in Hodgkins that was new, and I remonstrated with him one night.

"Hodge, you're getting all set up over this little piece of money you're making. Ease off a bit."

"Why—do you think so?" said Hodgkins seriously. "Is it evident?"

"Very much so," I replied.

"Now, Manders, I think you're wrong about that. I haven't put on any airs, have I?" he asked.

"Not with me, but a lot of your old friends are complaining that you don't speak to them on the street any more."

Hodgkins turned white. I thought he was angry. The blood came back into his face slightly and he said:

"I'm glad you told me, Manders, and I'm sorry if it is so. I wouldn't do anything like that for the world. Of course, I'm very much absorbed in business and I must get absent-minded spells."

I don't suppose that any of these little things would have been impressive had it not been for a visit I had from Mrs. Hodgkins not long after. She came into my office with an air of great secrecy.

Mrs. Hodgkins is a woman with a good heart and a friendly, motherly personality. She dresses simply and still smacks of the seacoast town in Maine from whence she came. I had been entertained in her home and knew her fairly well, but it seemed peculiar that she should call on me at my office.

"Oh, Mr. Manders! I am so worried about John," she began. "He is so different—I wish we hadn't made this money."

I WAS embarrassed. If John Hodgkins was unpleasant in his home, it was unfortunate; but the blame did not rest with me. I intimated this to Mrs. Hodgkins, but she swept it aside as immaterial.

"You know, Mr. Manders, he used to consider you his best friend; so I thought you could say something to him. It's just as if his head were turned." Her eyes filled with tears.

"It's a delicate job for an outsider, Mrs. Hodgkins, and I don't know just how to go about it," I said thoughtfully. "I don't see much of Mr. Hodgkins these days. Since his sudden prosperity, he seems to be occupied with other acquaintances and other affairs, and I find him different to me than in the old days. Do you think he is well?"

"Oh, John has always been very well. But he's not natural, Mr. Manders, he's uncanny. It seems as if he had spells; sometimes he is my dear old John, and at other times he is so distant and formal, as though I were a stranger. It's hard to sit through a dinner with him when he's like that, because he tries to make talk, and he looks so bored that I feel like crying."

"Is his business worrying him?"

"No"—thoughtfully. "I don't see how that could be. He has been so successful. But sometimes he will go for days without even kissing me, and when I remind him of it he gets embarrassed, just as if he wasn't used to it—and he has to be told to remember so many ordinary things."

"Oh, is his memory poor?" I asked.

"No, you couldn't say that," she replied, "because he remembers the littlest things once I tell him. He couldn't remember the number of his safe-deposit box and we had to search his papers one night; but once he found it, he has never forgotten it. Only he takes such pains to find out things—Oh, Mr. Manders, do you suppose—"

"No. No, indeed, I do not, Mrs. Hodgkins—I don't think anything of the sort. He is the sanest, soundest man you ever met. You needn't worry about that at all. It is probably a case of having many large affairs on his mind and feeling the responsibility of his obligations."

Soothing her to the best of my ability, I led her from the office and bade her good-by, promising her my best endeavors to reason with her husband. But oh, how I dreaded the job!

Friendship between men is based principally on freedom from personal criticism and I would never have brought the matter up, I think; but one noon after lunch as I was examining books in the back of Andy MacAncer's old shop, some one gave me a hearty thwack on the back.

"How's the old bookworm today?" shouted Hodgkins at me.

I didn't know whether to be friendly or formal, so I tried bantering him.

"Did you get permission from your chauffeur to come in here? And how are all the butlers and footmen today?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" roared Hodgkins, growing a little red in the face, however.

"But what are the money kings doing while you neglect them, Hodge?" I protested.

"Hang the money kings!" said Hodgkins. "Buy your book and come around to my office. I want to talk with you."

He bundled me into his car and a few moments later seated me in his private office with a box of cigars by my side.

WITHOUT preliminaries he asked, "Say, did Gracie come in to see you?"

I flushed. "Yes, Mrs. Hodgkins did call on me not long ago."

"What did she want?"—a little nervously.

"How did you know that your wife called on me?" I parried.

"She told me herself," he answered.

"Didn't she tell you her errand?" I asked simply.

He gulped and grinned sheepishly, and said:

"Yes, she sort of hinted at it."

"It is not a part of my duty as a citizen, Hodgkins, to undertake the correction of the personal behavior of my friends. Your wife asked me to do the impossible."

"What's that?" Hodgkins quickly inquired.

"She desires you to fulfil your obligations as a husband and father. She wishes that in your home at least, you would lay aside the cares of finance, the sense of intolerable dignity and pomp which seems to enshroud you during your working hours these prosperous days, and—"

"Enough, enough!" he shouted.

"More than enough," I said politely. "What are you going to do about it?" I interrupted.

HODGKINS got up and walked back and forth, apparently at a loss.

"Manders, old man, there is something wrong."

I nodded assent.

"But, Manders, I can't tell you what the matter is." He looked at me inquiringly.

"There is such a thing as too much prosperity," I suggested.

"That's all nonsense," he returned, "you know there isn't a simpler man in town than I am—you know perfectly well that I couldn't put on airs if I wanted to—that I am nothing but a down East farmer boy in spite of my city training—" He stopped. "But if that was all there was to it, how glad I'd be! This thing that's the matter with me is like a disease, or even worse." His lip trembled, and he looked just like a frightened little boy. "I'm afraid something has got into me that I don't understand, and I don't even dare go see a doctor. If I'm not crazy, I'm afraid I'm going crazy." His eyes filled with tears. "And now Gracie has come to you—" He stopped again.

I was encouraged by his frankness. "It's an unwarrantable impertinence on my part, Hodge, old man, to say anything to you. You know your own business best. I certainly would never have mentioned this subject if Mrs. Hodgkins had not rather forced it on me, and the only thing I want to suggest now, is that you try to manage your home affairs so that she won't feel the need of coming to your friends for help."

"YOU think then that it is something I can manage myself, Manders?"

"Of course," I assented.

"Then suppose you let me try it," he returned coldly.

"That was my intention," I said defensively, "but you brought the subject up."

"Be kind enough, then, to let me close it." He rose formally and extended his hand.

Taking my hat, I walked to the other side of the room.

"I assure you, Hodge, I had no desire to intrude. I—"

"I understand perfectly, Manders. I shall not trouble you with it again. Good day."

I was tempted to thrash the man. The dismissal was so unwarranted and so discourteous. Instead, I resolved that I would never give him the opportunity to arouse my anger again.

I went out in a very confused frame of mind. It seemed incredible that a man could so swiftly pass from the simple good-natured attitude of Hodgkins when he sought me out, to the cold, precise and academic manner with which he closed the interview.

During a period of three months I did not see him, although I read in the newspapers of his exploits. He was becoming quite spectacular; his wealth was growing to enormous proportions; he was building a summer home on the shore, and was constantly traveling to other cities for conferences.

ONE evening in June as I sat in my office alone, cleaning up some work that could not be finished during regular hours, I went to the window and watched the sun setting over the city. As I turned my back to the sunlight, I saw some one in the doorway leading from the hall. My eyes were dimmed from the glare of the sun, and at first I could not see who it was; but presently I recognized Hodgkins.

He was dressed with severe elegance but his face was curiously changed. The rotund outlines that I had known in the old days had fallen away, the flesh had gone, leaving the skin in folds, and the expression was querulous and unwholesome.

My face set in stern lines as I remembered our last interview.

"Well, sir," I said in my most formal manner.

"Mr. Manders, I have taken this opportunity of seeing you alone." His voice was harsh and the enunciation precise.

"Unless it is very important," I suggested, "I would prefer—"

"It is of the utmost importance," he replied.

"Then I trust you will be brief," I said.

"You're not cordial," he said with an attempt at heartiness.

"No, I'm not," I replied. "I have no reason to be."

"But this isn't the way to do business."

"Oh, then it's a business matter?" I asked.

"Yes, it's—a matter of great scientific interest and one of no little financial return to you. Are you interested in making a considerable sum of money, Manders?"

"Naturally," I said.

"Are you prepared to accept a retainer of, say, $100,000 a year for certain services in my behalf?"

"What do you want me to do?" I asked suspiciously.

"A very simple thing. I am offering you $100,000 as a fee for the use of one-half of your time."

"That is much more than I make with all of it now, Mr. Hodgkins."

"I know that," he said.

"What do you want me to do?" I said again.

Hodgkins swung the door shut, cutting off the direct sunlight.

"Manders, whom do you think you are talking to?"

I leaned back in my chair and looked at him almost insultingly.

"I am talking to a man by the name of John Hodgkins, who, at one time, although he was a simple fellow, had many good and lovable traits; but, through some unfortunate changes, he discovered how to make money, which has spoiled him completely. I am talking to John Hodgkins, a man who is ruined in everything but money."

Hodgkins placed both his hands flat on the table and leaned over toward me.

"Manders," he said in a tense voice, "you are doing nothing of the sort. You are talking to Donald Kirby!"

"What!" I shouted. I leaped to my feet.

"I said," he repeated, "you are talking to Donald Kirby."

THERE was a long pause. The name of Kirby had not been in my mind for months. I had almost forgotten him, but as I stared at the figure opposite me, I felt for a moment as if this fantastic thing were almost possible; and then my reason reasserted itself and I saw I was talking to a man of unsound mind. "Poor Mrs. Hodgkins," I thought. "What a life she must be living! What a metamorphosis must have taken place in old Hodgkins's brain to enable him to make money at the rate he has been going! The mad money king!"

"You don't believe me," he said savagely.

"No, not exactly," I replied. How could I? It was well to test this lunatic to find what limits he set for himself.

"But it's all very reasonable, Manders, if you will think for a moment. You are looking at the body of John Hodgkins—that is true; but the mind that is speaking to you is the mind of Donald Kirby—that also is true."

"How could both things be true?" I asked.

"It is simplicity, itself. If you will think back, you will remember that when I lived on Boylston Street, I intimated to you that I was on the verge of a wonderful discovery; that I was devoting all my time to one big psychological experiment."

"Yes, I remember," I said.

"And do you not remember your taking me to task for my invasion of the minds of other people? 'Invasion' was your own word, was it not?"

"Yes," I said.

"That evening, Manders, we were alone; no witnesses were present."

I nodded as I remembered the occasion.

"How could John Hodgkins know these facts?"

"Kirby could have told you," I said.

"Very well then, you shall have further proof," he replied. "Do you remember that John Hodgkins was the last person with Donald Kirby before Kirby died?"

"Yes, the police fixed that fact," I agreed.

"Do you remember that Donald Kirby went to Dr. Blanchard on the day of his death; and don't you remember that Dr. Blanchard told Kirby of a serious heart murmur?"

"Yes—yes, I know all these things and so does every one."

"Here then is what you do not know—what no one knows. I came away from Blanchard's office feeling that my worst fears had been realized. I had known for months that something was wrong with my heart, but I did not realize its importance, until one night I had a strange suffocating experience. I thought it might be angina, and it made me see that something must be done if I were to continue my great experiment. I consulted Dr. Blanchard on my first opportunity and saw there was no hope of retaining the body of Donald Kirby long enough to conclude my studies.

"That night Hodgkins called on me and asked me to hypnotize him. He did not believe I had done so before and he wanted positive proof." He smiled. "He has had his fill of proof since then. After I had placed Hodgkins in a hypnotic trance, I sent him into it deeper and deeper until the will and mind and ego of John Hodgkins occupied no more than a bare foothold in the brain. Then I made my plans most carefully. It was a severe test.

"I had thought for months—yes, years, that the time might come when it would be necessary for me to transfer myself from my broken body to some structure more sound and more dependable. It seemed as if Hodgkins was my opportunity. I had never found a more tractable subject, but believe me, Manders, on the verge of that great step I paused, because, even though a man's plans may be laid with the most extreme care, even though he is careful of the minutest detail of the law governing these conditions, it is a mighty thing to quit your own body, to cast the dice with Nature and to make the great effort. For all I knew, I might fail. To bring my mind, my ego, and my will, the treasures of the work of Donald Kirby, out of that body; to dominate this poor spiritless Hodgkins and to assume command and to inhabit his body —ah, it was magnificent!" He smacked his lips in appreciation.

"By an ingenious mechanical contrivance, I placed myself in a hypnotic condition so that I could coördinate both my conscious and my subconscious minds. Ah, I know—I know you will say that cannot be done, but I did it, Manders, I did it! I took myself out of my body! I left it a corpse—give me credit, Manders, I did not put John Hodgkins in my place. I did not eject him. I simply asked to share his house." He stopped.

I HAD been under the spell of his recital so that I almost believed him. There was something genuine—something sincere about it. It was a flight of the imagination utterly beyond the Hodgkins I knew. Mad or sane, he never could have conceived this thing; mad or not, he had not the courage to tell me of it even though he might imagine it. I did not speak.

"But, Manders, you told me something that night of our last interview that you could not have known—you must have divined it."

"What was that?" I asked.

"You told me that night that some higher law would catch me and put me in the dump heap, and you promised me I would live to see my reasoning proved futile. Do you remember that?"

"I do now," I replied.

"Did you know what you meant by that?"

"No, I do not—I only felt that you could not pursue your diabolical course uninterrupted."

He leaned over the table. "Manders, you were right! Your intuition was greater than your reasoning. You see me, Donald Kirby, standing before you in the body of John Hodgkins. Where do you think the mind of Hodgkins is?"

I hadn't thought. My face was a blank.

"It's still here, Manders, it's still here." He struck his forehead. "Here in this brain case, under my domination and control, still lives John Hodgkins." His voice sank to a whisper. "And he fights—my God, how he fights! This was a factor I failed to reckon with, Manders—the unquenchable power of the ego. I could have killed his body, but I cannot kill his mind. I can't eject him from his body. He is always here, always struggling for freedom. The task is too great. I cannot ceaselessly be on my guard. I must have rest and peace to pursue my experiments."

I was speechless. Granting for the moment his premise, I could find no fault in his logic. The madness, if such it was, was too sane, too reasonable. No madman would be willing to admit his own fault.

"So now, my proposition to you," he said. I started. "The time has come for a change. I must quit this body of John Hodgkins where I am an unwelcome guest; I must cease to be the master of an unconquered mind where I am bound by the very creature I have enslaved, and I must be received within another body as a welcome guest to share and share alike with another."

I was shocked and startled.

"I come to you, Manders, because you are a scientific man; because you can understand that so much more is at stake than you or me—ourselves; because you can see the great principle of the continuity of existence is bound up in this work of mine, and you can offer not only a resting-place but even assistance. Give me leave, therefore, to kill this horror of existence in Hodgkins's shell, to share with you your quiet, unruffled existence."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Ah, but the reward—the reward! One hundred thousand dollars a year so long as you shall live. One hundred thousand dollars, Manders—think of it! So that you shall have all the books and all of the music and all of the leisure, to say nothing of the fascinating opportunity of assisting me."

"Impossible," I repeated.

"One hundred thousand dollars not enough?" he grinned. "Say two hundred thousand; say three hundred thousand—only do not say too much, Manders. Do not let your avarice run away with you, because we would have to take our time away from our work to make more of this money—this silly, futile money, that we may take away from the silly, sordid business men. Oh, it's easy, Manders, but it takes time, and time is so precious to us. Name your price but don't overreach yourself."

"There is no price," I replied. "No money that you could offer would tempt me to permit such a thing."

I could not believe that he was mad. I had thought to play with him and instead, I met him on his own ground.

"ABSURD!" said Kirby. "Every man has his price. There must be things you want; things you have yearned for year after year. These things can all be bought. There is nothing you desire that we cannot buy. Money!" He laughed. "Why, Manders, if you had wanted money these years, you could have had your fill of it."

I shook my head impatiently. "You don't understand," I said.

"Then it isn't money you want?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Then it must be that you will help for the same reason that I am doing this thing. I am not selfish, Manders; I haven't gone through this of my own desire. It is something more important. It is a great secret."

It was my turn to lack understanding.

"What secret?" I asked stupidly.

For the first time impatience showed on his face.

"Manders, *get* this. From the time I was a small boy, when I first asked myself, 'What am I; where did I come from; where am I going?' I have followed this one course.

"Why have I lived; why have I studied; why have I voluntarily quitted my body? Don't you know? Because I have been driven by an unceasing, dominating passion to know these answers. The continuation of consciousness is the clue: you cannot quench life—the essence, the substance of individuality. Ah, yes, I knew that and I laughed bitterly.

"Before I took Hodgkins's body, I knew it but as an academic statement. I took my chance, Manders, to find the way out, to prove one step, and that step has been gained: consecutive material existence separated from the body, Manders. I proved it"—he pounded his chest—"I, Donald Kirby, speaking to you through the body of John Hodgkins; and I prove to you also that you cannot extinguish the ego, for Hodgkins is driving me out, will drive me out before he is done."

He leaned over the table and glared at me with almost a hypnotic intensity. I was cornered; I dared not look away from him; I felt my eyes grow fixed; I felt the skin tighten on my skull, and I summoned all my will to fight him.

"I will not let you come in!" I shouted.

"But, Manders, you can share in this great discovery with me! As partners, we could work side by side and you can share in the glorious discovery. You can have the glory. I shall never want it—I seek only my end."

It was a slip. It showed me the way out. With renewed courage, I stared back at him, unwavering, unafraid.

"Kirby or Hodgkins, mad or sane," I said, "you have answered yourself. If you are mad, if this is but a fantasy of a broken mind, then you are powerless. If what you say is true—if you are sane, then you have shown the utter impossibility of your own ideas."

He did not resent the imputation of lunacy. He stuck to the point.

"Why does it fail? Why is it weak?"

"Kirby," I said, and I laughed a little, "you have not scrupled to take possession of Hodgkins's mind. In the old days you told me yourself that the common understanding of morality was as nothing to you. You may be as sane as the sanest man, but your inflexible purpose to carry this unnatural plan of yours through betrays you." I smiled.

"If," I went on, "I were to permit you to try your manipulations on me, if you were successful—"

"I shall be!" he cried.

"If you were successful," I repeated, "you would not keep your end of the bargain, Kirby."

"But—" he commenced.

"No but's. Look me in the eye; you have intelligence; you know yourself; you know that once you gain possession of my body, you would no more hesitate to banish me from it than you have Hodge. You know no law, Kirby, but your own will, and again you have run square into solid laws of nature."

"Preaching!" he snarled.

"Fact," I returned, "I do not trust you. You will not keep your word. You have no sense of honor. You are ego run mad."

Of a sudden a thought struck me. I leveled my finger at him.

"You represent the age-old legend of Lucifer—before God, you may be!"

HE CHOKED and gagged and fell back in the chair; his face became livid. It was as if I had said a talismanic word. Gradually his face became ashen white, his breathing seemed almost to stop, and then—the eyes again opened and met mine with a fatuous friendly smile.

"Hello, you old bookworm! What are you doing here?"

To me it was as if I had been pushing with all my might against a tremendous force—the force was suddenly withdrawn, and I almost mentally sprawled on the ground before him.

"Why—why—" I stuttered.

"Say, you look all flustered—just like you'd been getting angry."

"I am angry," I said.

"Shucks, not with me! Say!" he exclaimed, and looked around. "How did I get in your office?" He blushed. "Have I had another spell?" he asked.

"Spell?" I said. "Do you call that a spell?"

A plaintive look came in his face—a strange questioning expression that was almost pathetic.

"Old man," he said, "there is something wrong with me. Don't you remember over in my office how I kind of hinted that everything wasn't all right?"

"Yes—but what is it?" I asked.

He shook his head sadly.

"It's just like I went to sleep, only it isn't when I go to bed. I wake up finding myself in all sorts of strange places. I go off to sleep right in the middle of doing something and I don't remember anything more till I wake up again. Gracie is worried half to death."

"Is that all you know about it?" I asked. "How is it when you go to sleep?"

"I don't know," he said. "I just feel drowsy—" His eyes closed. "I feel so sleepy—so drowsy—sleepy—drowsy—sound asleep—"

Before I knew it, his head rolled on one side.

"Hodge!" I called. "Hodge!" I snapped my fingers. "Wake up!" But there was no answer. I slapped him soundly on the face. "Hodge, wake up!" I shouted. Still no answer.

Then I counted impressively, "One—two—three—" and slapped him smartly on the cheek. Nothing happened. I dashed to the outer office for a glass of water. When I returned, a pair of keen, sharp eyes were staring at me.

"You see, it's no use, Manders. I still have him under my control."

The glass dropped from my hand and clattered away into a corner without breaking.

"Did I shock you?" he asked.

"Yes," I said briefly.

"Well, Manders, that's just it. At times he gets the better of me. The times are becoming more frequent. I am desperate—I must do something and at once. I did not plan this but it is well you have seen it. Now you must see why you must share your body with me. You *must*, I say. I show you the whole world of desire before you. It's yours. I show you unlimited power. It's yours—only share with me your body and help me in this work."

A PASSION and earnestness ran through all this, so that I was touched, strange as it may seem. I felt almost reverential toward such determination, such persistence. He must have read my face.

"You *will!*" he exclaimed, and grasped my hand, shaking it vigorously.

The touch aroused me.

"I will not!" I thundered back. "Though you were twenty times as powerful as you say; though you offered me a hundredfold more, you still are the symbol of evil; though you may thrill my imagination, you arouse my enmity—" My voice dropped. "Kirby, people don't sell themselves to the devil any more."

I think I never saw such malevolence as glared from the eyes of Kirby. He rose to his feet.

"Manders, is this your last word?"

"It is," I said.

"Do you realize, Manders, that you are sealing my death warrant?"

"No, I do not admit it," I replied.

"That aside," he went on, "do you realize you are doing an infinitely greater wrong to humanity by refusing me this opportunity? Can you really be willing to halt the search for the great answer?"

"If it must be accomplished by such means as you feel free to employ, Kirby, then the great question need never be answered."

"Is this final?" he asked solemnly.

"Absolutely," I replied.

He seemed almost to wither before me.

"I am done," he muttered to himself. Then suffused by a new thought, he straightened up and went out into the night.

THE end came a few weeks later. A telephone summoned me to Hodgkins's house. I could not stay away, much as I dreaded the going.

It was the first time I had been in Hodgkins's new residence. I was hurried up the wide stairs to a room at the rear of the house, and there on a single bed lay a gaunt figure, still and silent. Two doctors and a nurse stood at the head of the bed, and Mrs. Hodgkins was collapsed at the foot. A doctor came toward me.

"He asked for you a little while ago," he said.

"What is it?" I asked.

He shook his head. "We don't know. It seems like a coma—a syncope. Dr. Blanchard can tell you more about it. He has been on the case longer."

It was with relief that I recognized my old friend, Dr. Blanchard. Gravely, he greeted me.

"There's something strange here," he said. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Perhaps," I said; "but I could not tell you here."

"You're right," he said. "All we can do now is watch. I think he's dying, and yet, queerly enough, he rallies every once in a while."

We watched for half an hour; then the eyes opened with a frightful glare. The head weakly turned from side to side, taking in the people—at least, I was discovered. An unearthly croak came from the body on the bed, and then again all was still.

"Salt solution," said Dr. Blanchard.

There was a swift click of instruments, and the doctor applied his stethoscope. Finally he stood up.

"I'm afraid he's gone," he said.

Mrs. Hodgkins groaned, and fainted. The nurse and doctors then turned their attention to her, and I stood confused by my feelings.

As they worked over Mrs. Hodgkins I noticed a strange thing. The face of the figure on the bed had turned from chalk white to warm red. The hands seemed to be moving from beneath the bedclothes, and the supposedly dead man gave vent to an enormous sneeze that startled every one nearly out of his wits. Mrs. Hodgkins had been returning to consciousness. With a shriek, she swooned again. The doctors left her and rushed to the bedside.

Hodgkins raised himself. "Wh-wh-where am I?" he asked, looking at all of us in a puzzled fashion.

TO THIS day, Dr. Blanchard and I have never been able to agree. We have matched our stories. Circumstantial evidence never was stronger, and yet we do not know what to believe.

Hodgkins finally lost most of his money, and he's just a humdrum pleasant old fellow again.

"Hypostasia" is what Dr. Blanchard calls it, but that doesn't explain it.

"It looks as if Kirby stole about a year and a half of Hodgkins's life," said Dr. Blanchard, "but we'll never know."

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1925

The White Pigeon

Accident Gave the Hardened but Ambitious Small-Part Singer the Applause He Had Been Craving for Years; and Then—

By Prosper Buranelli

CESARE was a little old tenor with a cracked voice who sang small parts, the Messenger in "Aida," or Borsa in Rigoletto." Honor among his fellows and the applause of the public were lacking for him and had been through all his years in art. He was never praised and whenever any one sang badly people said that Cesare could have done as well. He had traveled with twenty troupes, knew all the operas and sang phrases of difficult musicianship; but nobody regarded that. Nobody ever gave any honor to the small-part singer. Cesare might as well have sung in the chorus.

Yet his ears yearned for hand-clapping and shouts of "Bravo," for that sweet clamor that rises, subsides a little, hangs in lingering persistence and rises again. The orchestra conductor slaps his trouser leg with his baton, waiting to continue the performance; the impresario smiles as he hears the tumult vaguely while counting the money in the box office; the applauded one bows with a backbone that is oiled with a willing ecstasy. The next morning he reads the criticisms in the newspapers—voice of golden quality, the true bel canto style. These are joys more precious than the adoration of a hundred well-dressed women. They were joys that would never be his, Cesare knew. He might grow six feet tall in his old age, but he would never have to explain to an audience that he was too tired to sing an encore.

He found relief from these shadows in the cultivation of jollity and comic extravagance. He played tricks, wrinkled his ugly little nose, talked in grandiloquent similes, told malicious stories about others and himself and invented jokes and philosophies. He could make a pint of vinegar laugh, and laughter was the only applause he got. The people of the company said that Cesare's soul had turned into a jest and could never be serious again.

It was an hour before curtain time. Cesare stood in the shadow of the wings, his shoulder-blades against a painted tree, his olive eyes motionless in a dreamy contemplation. Halfway across the stage stood the tenor Zanoni, the best advertised singer of the Calabria Royal Grand Opera Company, who, with his derby hat in his hand and a large muffler wrapped around his throat, chattered and gesticulated. Beside him smiled a young woman in bright silks. Her right hand rested on her hip, her evening wrap hung back from her shoulders. She opened her painted lips widely, showing teeth that were even, large and white, and her body swayed from side to side in an outbreak of laughter. The sound of her mirth reverberated in Cesare's big ears like the music of a harp and six clarinets.

"She has the laughter of Queen Venus upon straying into a beauty parlor," he muttered, grinning with the abandon of moon-haunted clowns. Never before had he felt so merry.

The troupe was closing a long and profitable stay in Akron, Ohio, with its first performance of "The City of Nests," a new Russian opera in which was enacted a romance of birds. Already the stage was set for the first act, with the Golden Hawk's home of straw in the foreground. It was a well press-agented piece, with great opportunities of display for the singers, the principal singers. The tenor Zanoni was to be the White Pheasant. Every act was filled with showy notes for his voice. His success would rise as high as the top note of a piccolo. He would strut around the stage with the magnificence of a millionaire in a gilded overcoat.

Cesare was to be the Black Duck. He came on stage at the rise of the curtain, walked about grotesquely for a dozen bars, sang a recitative of six notes, gesticulated for several bars further, went off as the chorus entered, and was not seen again. That recitative was difficult, moving soft and sustained over chords of sharp dissonance. He would get no honor for it. He had appeared on the stage at every performance for a month in this town of Akron, but audiences did not know him and the critics never mentioned his name. On this gala night, full of glory for the others, his obscurity was complete. He might as well wear a shirt of invisibility and sing in silence to his own soul.

His heart was bursting with humor. His little nose twisted with jocularity. A hundred witticisms were jigging on his tongue. He wanted to enact a pantomime of ludicrous gesticulations and preach a sermon of jokes.

Near the smudgy back of the curtain the tenor Zanoni talked with conceited grimaces. The girl sat down on a broken chair with her forearms on her knees and looked up smiling. In his corner between tall pieces of scenery Cesare studied the pink roundness of her dimpling cheeks.

It would be a pleasure to joke with her. The ends of his thick little mouth moved upward, and his eyelids drooped pink and wrinkled.

HER father was a Congressman, her mother the local patroness of music. She dressed in furs and rode behind a liveried chauffeur. At times she made visits to the opera troupe and received the deference of impresario, orchestra conductor and principal singers. She was of a disposition lively, capricious and kind, and of an intelligence that discontented her with noisy dances and empty athletics. The company of musical folk, especially the Italians, had captivated her with their unrestrainedness and their singularity of thought.

A social evening among them was to her a sojourn in Bohemia, a country that she often talked about, and she tried to put herself into the high, vivid mood of the people of opera, and gave herself over to boisterousness, making satirically long faces with the star baritone and his solemn loquaciousness, dancing around the stage with the company's merry press agent after a rehearsal while an obliging clarinetist and tympanist in the orchestra pit played a waltz. Cesare had observed her attentively. With her American ways she was mysterious to him, but she was so highly placed and well dressed that he had said to himself:

"She must be as proud as a mouse that has given birth to kittens." Often he had wanted to exhibit his drolleries before her, but had not ventured to thrust himself forward, and nobody had offered to introduce him to her.

Now on this night so mad and merry for him, his desire arose and climbed onto a church steeple. To make a witty saying and see those graceful lips curve in response —what an applause, what a réclame! He felt himself an earthquake of comedy, a roaring lion of humor.

"I could make her laugh like the race of women on Judgment Day when they are summoned to stand forth—the virtuous wives."

The tenor Zanoni straightened his necktie. The Congressman's daughter blurted a saying. She dropped her arms beside her chair, lifted her heels, threw back her head and stretched open her mouth.

"May my nose turn into a spider!" A rapturous sigh blew out of Cesare's lips.

He would give her a comedy. Her turban would slant still more on her brown head. She would push her handkerchief into her mouth. Her little blue eyes would close and open in spasms. He knew a hundred stories.

There was a tenor in Venice who sang an aria so perfectly one night that the audience made him repeat it six times—the sixth time he broke on the top note, and they hissed him off the stage. Or there was a ballet dancer who had to stand on one toe in a difficult pose while the violins sustained a note—the orchestra conductor, who had tried to make love to her, held the note so long that her toe broke.

Cesare would select the most comical, and relate it to the girl, illuminating each point with an appropriate twist of the hand, elevation of the shoulder and mimicry of the nose. This night would be a night of triumph for him.

The Congressman's daughter arose, slapped the tenor Zanoni on the arm and swaggered across the stage to the dressing-room of a soprano. Cesare looked at his watch. Stage hands were pushing pieces of scenery around. It was time to make up. He climbed three flights of stairs to his dressing-room.

He sat in his underclothing, and indolently rubbed a stick of scarlet on his cheeks. Near his elbow lay his costume of a black duck, with glossy feathers of a greenish sheen. At intervals he inhaled a puff of cigarette smoke. His wits lay snared in a fantasy, a gorgeous sight of laughing lips, a visioned short-nosed face that raised itself to him in the beauty of mirth. He must tell her his story after the first act.

Outside the theater, near the stage entrance, waited a round, stunted fellow, with peering eyes and a great, black mustache. The tenor Zanoni came out of the door.

"Ebben!" The man gave him a taciturn salutation.

They walked around a corner.

"This is an important performance." Zanoni took bank notes out of his pocket. "I must have a good success."

"Ebben!" The fat man counted the money with dignity.

He was the captain of the claque. In every city where the company went he gathered a band of strong-handed fellows, and marshaled them at the important performances to lead the acclaim for the principal singers. Zanoni was his best patron.

"There must be good applause when I come on stage first." The tenor spoke imperatively. "When I sing there must be an ovation."

"Ebben!" The short fellow raised his shoulders with the assurance of a worker who understands his task.

Zanoni raised his hand to draw his listener's attention sharply.

"Everybody is a bird. I am the white bird."

"The only one?"

"The only white bird."

"We will break our hands for the white bird."

Zanoni went to his dressing-room on the ground floor to array himself in the fineries of the White Pheasant.

THREE flights up Cesare deepened in his fantasy. He saw an underlip, soft, round and crimson, that drooped and trembled, and the curling shape of a plump and joyous cheek, and into him entered a soul of the laughter that flames and dances past the North Star. His arms fell upon the dressing-table before him, one across the score of an opera, the other across the costume of the Black Duck.

His cigarette slipped out of his fingers. It fell onto a paper of matches. Burning tobacco touched on red tips. They fired. Cesare snatched his hand away, dragged a towel, and knocked over a bottle of gasoline. The glass broke, and the liquid spread under the black duck costume to the blazing matches. A flame puffed. The acrid smoke of burning feathers arose. Fumbling, Cesare seized a tattered rug from the floor, and threw it over the conflagration.

He flung open a window, and cold, pure air blew in. He removed the rug, and raised up the costume. A shower of feathers fell from burned fabric. A hole gaped. Cesare stood aghast. The costume was ruined. He could not wear it. He ran to the door, and thrust his head out.

"Annunziata!" he shouted.

Out of a door at the end of the hall appeared the brown, wrinkled face of the wardrobe mistress.

"Cos' e?" the woman screamed.

"Come here."

The tone of urgency brought Annunziata scolding and shuffling through the hall.

"There has been a catastrophe." Cesare's fat legs danced a reckless step, as he held up the damaged raiment.

Scowling, the wardrobe mistress took and scrutinized the costume.

"To repair it is impossible." Her right arm flew up angrily.

Cesare understood that.

"Give me another."

"There is no other. There is only a white bird."

"But I am black."

The vixen shook her bunched fingers under Cesare's nose.

"There is only a white bird."

Cesare ran into the hall, and screamed for the stage manager. Annunziata stumbled cursing to her quarters. A Neapolitan with a pointed nose and a cunning, merry smile came the stairs.

"What is the matter?"

The woman returned with the costume of a snowy pigeon, and filled the room with words. The stage manager looked at his watch with a sour expression.

"It is nearly time. It is idiotic to be a white pigeon when you are a black duck, but he will have to wear it. There are people who always do something stupid." He hurried out.

Cesare pulled on the silvery costume. Annunziata helped him grudgingly, mumbling the while over the ruin of the black duck. The old fellow responded with sour gibes.

"My feathers have turned white through grief for having to listen to thistle-tongued old wild-cats."

"You make jokes." Annunziata straightened up, squealing with fury. "A worthless fellow like you shouldn't have so much mouth. You cause trouble, and think it is something to laugh at."

As he pulled the feathery garb over his shoulders, Cesare mocked with a twitching of his nose.

"I would rather wear exploding cannon balls for earrings than listen to two wags of your flinty jaw." He spat on the floor.

"You insult people." Annunziata pushed her fat body toward him menacingly. "Who are you? You have no voice. What do they give you to sing? Four notes. Do you get applause? Is your name in the newspapers? What importance have you? None. You are a nobody."

"Ha-ha!" Cesare rocked with a tremendous laugh.

The woman stamped out of the room. Cesare stood with his eyes closed and his legs spread apart.

A nobody! The anointed pope of nobodies! He turned his jokes upon his own nose with the gracelessness of a pantaloon who has declared himself the enemy of all inward dignity. A greater nobody than the drop of water that lived on top of a vat of wine. He grinned maliciously, as if into his own face, and grew intoxicated with his own unimportance. Everybody knew that he loathed success, and, in his satirical madness, would make gibes and comical faces at applause if it came to him. A superb illusion appeared in his mind. He saw the Congressman's daughter. Her hand clutched his arm, steadying her shaking form, as he raised his voice to project above her gasping cries the closing good humors of a story.

HE WENT downstairs to the stage. As he passed the closed door of Zanoni's dressing-room, he heard the tenor practicing a phrase. Stage hands were placing rocks of papier-mâché. A sound of applause from the auditorium told that the conductor was at his desk. Cesare stood waiting in the wings. The short prelude began with half a dozen notes of blended bassoons, clarinets and xylophone, which imitated the quacking of a duck. Cesare thought he had never heard anything so funny.

"Coo—coo!" He mimicked the strutting of a pigeon.

The violins soared in lascivious discords. The brasses snorted in broken rhythms. The cellos sang a strange counter melody.

A nobody! The thundering Jupiter on the Olympus of nobodies. As the ancient singer's mood lifted itself to dizziness, a glittering fancy fell into his brain.

"I will tell her the story of—" He choked with elation, and the limp, white wings at his shoulders shook and clattered.

He always had to laugh at the story of Luigi Barazzi.

The prelude was done, the audience applauding. Cesare strained his arms into the pigeon's wings, and pulled the headpiece, with its bird beak, over his forehead. The music began again. The curtain parted. The stage manager gave Cesare the signal to go on. He straightened his face, and struck a pose.

"She will split her cheeks . . ." His soul was ablaze with laughter and the laughing girl and the story of Luigi Barazzi.

He stepped onto the stage, and advanced, swaying his white, feathered form from side to side in a slow pantomime of hesitant seeking. The theater was crowded. Women in evening dress sat in boxes. In the pit the musicians scraped bows and blew horns in the labor of an orchestral fortissimo. Above the din of the instruments, Cesare heard a sound that made him halt in his gait. It was the sound of hand-clapping.

"But what—" He peered incredulously

into the gaping darkness of the auditorium.

The orchestra sank abruptly to the solo phrase of an oboe. It was—truly—hand-clapping. A loud and insistent tattoo sounded from the depth of the house. It increased. Some of the people in the boxes applauded.

"It cannot be." Cesare stretched out his long, white wings in an agony of bewilderment.

But it was.

At last . . . At last . . .

His beaked head drooped with a great and solemn emotion. At last, the public had recognized his merit. He bent in a stately obeisance. The applause grew louder. Cesare held his head back like an ancient emperor who, in courtly pomp, gives ear to a song of his glory. He doubled in another ceremonious bow, and yet another. In the pit orchestra players and conductor looked from stage to audience with glances of astonishment.

Cesare continued his mimicry of a bird in search of its mate, peering this way and that, while his spirit moved with grave meditations. Now he stood a valuable and respected person. He could sing his recitative and know that it was taken as the performance of an artist. In the wings lounged the Congressman's daughter with a look of wonderment in her face. Cesare raised his head with a simple grandeur, and gazed at her.

The orchestra conductor nodded to him. He marched to the footlights. A chord of oboes and muted trumpets shrilled discordantly. Cesare sang a high F sharp; then his voice descended in sustained semitones with words bewailing the absence of the loved one. When he had done he waited in a pose of noble contentment. Again the rhythm of hand-clapping. Cesare bowed to the knees. The applause swelled. He bowed again. Voices from the back shouted "Bravo." Cesare spread open his great pigeon's wings, and bent with a sweeping majesty. His eyes turned to the Congressman's daughter. Beside her whispered the Neapolitan stage manager. Cesare threw back his head with a frown of regal pride. She would understand now that he was a serious artist.

While he moved to the back of the stage, simulating the postures of disappointment after a search, his spirit rode on the sad, lofty wind of immense fulfilment. The desire that had been his aching companion so long now had vanished in this supreme accomplishment. Again he flung his glance upon the girl in the wings, and filled his eyes with her pensive beauty. A desire marched in lordly pomp. It would be a pleasure to have an hour's talk with her, some thoughtful conversation about his art. The operatic chorus of ravens filed on stage from one side. Cesare halted, turned to the audience, and, with a rite of native dignity, bowed the gratitude of his darkly brooding heart. He went off through a bowerlike door in the back drop.

A thin little woman dressed in tan met him.

"A SPLENDID success!" She spoke in a tone of well-bred rapture.

She was the music critic of an Akron newspaper, who, having listened to the opera at the dress rehearsal, was hunting back of the scenes for human touches.

Cesare bowed with great formality.

"You must feel very happy after your reception tonight." She began to interview him. They walked slowly along the dark passage between the drop and the wall.

Cesare discoursed in sententious phrases, nodding his head slowly and raising one wing and then the other. He spoke of his importance. He was the world's foremost small-part singer. His art was a profound one. Most people did not understand, but the public of Akron—an intelligent public—had understood.

The critic's voice rose in an unctuous cadence.

"That is a compliment that I must certainly convey to our opera lovers."

Cesare's mood grew more somber and arrogant. He said he took his talent seriously. One should take one's talent seriously.

"That is an interesting thought." The critic's tone was deeply meditative. "We must have quite a story of your triumph in the morning paper."

Cesare's glance wandered like an eagle's. Where was that girl? He loved her.

They stopped before the door to the hall that led to the dressing-rooms, while he mounted eloquent in his philosophy of the serious.

Outside, a little distance down the hall, the Congressman's daughter stood with the stage manager.

"What did they make that applause for?" The Neapolitan raised his shoulders to his ears.

A fat, pink-faced fellow with rimless spectacles came into the hall from the auditorium. He was the secretary of the company, a Californian. He clutched the arm of the stage manager, stammering with laughter.

"Where is Cesare? The claque made a mistake." He began to chatter.

He had crossed the back of the house as Cesare had finished his little recitative. He had watched the claque set the audience applauding. The leader, seeing him, had come to him with the remark, in a tone of superior criticism, that something was wrong with Zanoni's voice that night. The secretary had replied that the White Pigeon was not Zanoni, but Cesare. The chief claquer had broken into curses against Zanoni for having given him no more definite instruction than to applaud the white bird.

The girl and the Neapolitan fell against the wall.

"We've got to tell Cesare." The secretary pushed between them, and, putting his arms around them, drew them along. "He'll enjoy it. What a funny joke he'll make of it!"

"Has this Cesare such a wonderful sense of humor?" the girl snickered.

The stage manager stopped, and hitched up his trousers.

"You don't know Cesare."

"It is true," the Neapolitan nodded in sour agreement. "He will disrupt the company with the farce that he will make of it."

The door ahead opened, and two figures stepped slowly forth. Cesare's face was a mask of tragic earnestness. He had one wing outstretched.

"And my advice to young singers . . ." His voice reverberated through the hall.

The Neapolitan turned to his two companions with a saturnine grimace.

"He is making a comedy already," he said in a low voice. "He has guessed the joke."

"Think so?" The secretary was amazed.

"He must have seen them breaking their hands back there." The stage manager felt himself a man of penetration. "And he has begun the buffoonery with the newspaper."

Cesare saw the group down the hall, and turned to them with a tremendous bow. The critic's hand fluttered in a sprightly salutation.

The Neapolitan scowled at the grinning girl.

"Can you stop laughing?"

Her face turned solemn.

"We will give him our congratulations, and help his fun along." He took her by the arm, and they advanced to meet the two who came slowly along the hall.

The wizened little music critic greeted them with a fervent outpouring.

"Why, my dears! I have just been hearing some wonderful things from this great artist—things about the importance of taking life seriously."

Cesare gazed at her with a superb air. The secretary turned away, smothering his laughter. The point of an elbow smote his ribs.

"What did I tell you?" the Neapolitan whispered.

The girl gave him a glance of assent. Cesare was bowing to her, as the critic introduced them to each other.

"BRAVO, Cesare!" The stage manager raised his arm in dramatic salutation.

Cesare grew taller.

"Cesare, you're the hit of the show." The secretary stepped forward with a prodigious wink.

The hero's responding glance was a little disdainful. He did not like the fat Californian's levity.

The girl made an impulsive stride.

"It was so thrilling!"

Cesare spread out one wing in a gesture of declamation.

"For this moment of success, I have studied many years."

The girl clasped her hands and raised her eyes. The little woman in tan contemplated the ancient singer with the doting smile of one who sponsors happiness. Neapolitan and Californian moved to one side, nudging each other. They went through the door to the stage to release their laughter and bring some others to witness the magnificence of Cesare's joke.

The hero, with the Congressman's daughter on one side and the music critic on the other, advanced down the hall in a stately procession. At the door that led into the auditorium the sharp-faced little woman spoke a farewell of many words. Cesare remained alone with the girl.

She turned with a glance, ready to laugh with him over the comedy she thought he had been playing, but the expression on the old fellow's face stopped her. Melting grease paint curved fantastically over features that were set in the lines of somber emotion.

"Ah, signorina!" Cesare flung out his wings as though he were about to fly away. "I have sadness in my heart."

At the breaking tone of his voice she stepped back.

"But an artist"—he flamed with pride—"may speak his soul to a beautiful young woman."

Her full lips puckered with a startled twist.

"It is"—his voice grew hollow with the solemnity of doom—"it is the sadness of love."

The girl wrinkled her forehead, and twined her fingers around each other. Cesare raised himself on his toes and intoned a chant of intemperate arrogance and conquest.

"I have heard the applause of the public. I have had a triumph of art. Only one thing more is needed to crown this night of glory."

They stood motionless, the girl aghast at the insanity of the farce, Cesare darkening in his gloomy exaltation. Through the door from the stage at the other end of the hall appeared the Californian secretary, cackling with merriment.

"Finished the interview, Cesare?" He stumbled forward eagerly.

Cesare turned, his hairy eyebrows twisting downward in a scowl. What was the fool laughing at?

"Oh, Cesare! You sure handed that critic an earful." The approaching jester choked. "But you should have seen those fellows giving you a hand. . . ."

A balloon of wrath swelled in Cesare's bosom. This spectacled secretary never did have any sense.

"Where do you see anything humorous?" The old fellow spoke contemptuously.

The secretary grew dizzy with admiration.

"Still at it, Cesare?" He bent with laughter. "Say, you're good, but you should have seen them." He was eager to put in his own narration.

Cesare flapped his wings with rage.

"Are you so stupid that you don't know what it is to be serious?"

"Keep it up, Cesare, keep it up." The Californian writhed with delight.

The old fellow made a menacing step.

"Are you one of those empty heads who try to invent jokes?"

"Oh, Cesare!" the secretary moaned.

The angry singer thrust forth his wings, and tried to push the fat man away. The secretary grasped a feathered arm, and strove to recover his breath. To him the comedy had ascended to an unimagined rapture.

"But you should have seen those lads back there," he stumbled on with anxious persistence, "when they found they had made a mistake."

The ancient tenor looked at him scornfully. What was he vaporing about, the gabbler? In the corner the Congressman's daughter stood lost in a trance of horror and pity.

"YOU should have seen their faces when I told them the white bird—it was you—not Zanoni."

Cesare's knees grew stiff. His wits went groping. What doom was that?

"And they—oh, it was too funny!" The secretary rocked with the climax. "They had claqued the wrong man."

A shower of light burst from a sky of curses. A foul, gigantic sun flamed at the zenith. The figure of misfortune, like a satanic mosque, reared and glowed in baleful splendor, and a loud voice wailed a song of disaster. Cesare's glory had turned into a limping toad.

The unhappy fellow stood with bending knees, turning his face away to hide his anguish. His heart pounded with heavy, shattering strokes. The secretary, wild with the spirit of farce, slapped him on the back.

"It's the finest blunder a claque ever made, Cesare. Everybody is laughing about it."

Laughing? The word raised a blister on the old man's heart. Laughing? His understanding of comedy engulfed him, and his entrails curled with a monstrous pain. A fantasy of devils paraded before him, howling a litany. He took his talent seriously; the intelligence of the public of Akron; his advice to young singers; the years he had studied for this triumph. . . . An artist could speak his soul to a beautiful young woman . . . He had had a triumph of art. He had made a twisted-nosed ape of himself. There was no more grotesque lunatic in bedlam than he. The foolish longing that he had hidden in his vitals mischance had tricked into the light, and now it stood revealed in absurdities of grandeur, a hitching post for the ridicule of every wag in the company. His limbs turned cold with the chill, he thought, of approaching death.

The secretary studied Cesare's trembling shoulders, and grew quiet and perplexed. He was never able to understand the depths of the old man's farces. He spoke in a tone of reasonable expostulation.

"But you saw the joke right away, didn't you, Cesare? You saw the claque applauding back there."

Cesare heard the exclamation vaguely, and with a feeble effort tried to find its meaning.

Through the door from the stage came the stage manager. Beside him walked the chorus master of the company, a paunchy mustached Frenchman.

"Eh, Cesare! Have you finished your fun with the critic?" The Neapolitan's voice rose droll with dialect. "It has been your most perfect and ingenious comedy."

A soul of startled alertness was distilling in the ancient singer's eyes. He gazed first at the two men approaching and then at the secretary beside him. With tightened lips and teeth showing even and white, he had the expression of a waiting beast that plans a stratagem. The Neapolitan regarded the wild old pigeon with the grin that Cesare's extravagant fooleries always brought to his mouth. The French chorus master raised and lowered his fat eyelids. Cesare thrilled with an enormous fancy. They thought he had been joking. He would make it certain that they never doubted it. His triumph of serious art had turned into a sausage skin stuffed with worms. It would stand high in another shirt, as a triumph of humor. With minglement of shame and cunning elation the understanding came of how sublime his behavior had been when interpreted as comedy.

He twisted his face around to the three men who stood together, and broke into a sly, jolly grin that set creases across the bridge of his wide, stubby nose.

"Eh!" he exclaimed with ludicrous inflection. "Is it not sometimes necessary to make a farce?"

The secretary grinned with delight.

"You guessed it right away, Cesare. It certainly was wonderful."

CESARE straightened up with a dogmatic, boastful laugh.

"The best was on the stage. Did you see it? When I watched them knocking their hands to pieces back there I wanted to fall down with the joke, but I cocked my head up—you know how that imbecile Zanoni holds his unintelligent block until it is ready to drop off backward. I made a bow to the claque that broke my spine—like Zanoni. I made twenty bows. When I sang I stepped on an electric globe—that stupid Zanoni cannot flat a note unless he has the footlights burning his toes. I moved my nose and stared impudently at every one—was I not Zanoni?"

The three men who listened had not guessed the comedy so fine, but it was clear now that Cesare had been mimicking the company's vain first tenor. Even the interview with the critic was such as the foolish Zanoni would have given. They surveyed the ancient buffoon with the grinning rebuke and admiration of sensible men for an unreasonable wag. The cackle of their mirth set a supercilious smile on Cesare's mouth. This too was glory. He moved his shoulders disdainfully.

"It is not every one who can make a comedy," he said.

His arrogant glance turned to the Congressman's daughter behind him. She stood apart in a corner. Two thoughtful lines lay between her eyes; her mouth drooped with a troubled expression, and she contemplated Cesare pityingly. The old man's elation sickened. Her gentle glance was a merciless accusation. She was not fooled—oh, that disastrous love-making!—and she would make the others understand. With her pride and scornful gaiety she would turn his stately absurdities into a rib-bursting discourse. An overmastering thought came. He must deceive her, must persuade her that he had been joking all the while. He must make her laugh as the others laughed—a task for the guile of all the devils. He must lash himself onto the loftiest platform of his genius, and inspire in her so much mirthful awe of the limitless folly of his jesting that she would believe his misbegotten courtship a part of his supposititious parody.

Suddenly his feathered legs moved in a limping waltz. The great white wings swept up and down grotesquely. His face leered with ribaldry. Then with supplicating grimaces and postures he mocked the sentimental enchantment that had exalted him, imitating the extravagances that would be seen were the jester, Rigoletto, to enact a fantastic caricature of amorous wooing. Bending on one knee, skipping a step, rising on one toe, rolling his eyes and embracing an imagined figure, he advanced toward the somber-faced young woman.

"A crown is on my head, girl. It is a crown of pig's ears and sardine cans. Come, dance with me. A hero's mantle is on my shoulders. It is the skin of an ape embroidered with cabbage leaves. Come and—fly—with me." He moved his wings in great, birdlike flaps.

The uproar of men's laughter warmed his ears, and a flame of vanity burned in him. He could charm a grin onto the face of a Chinese dragon carved of iron. But the girl had only deepened in her dark meditation. A hook of despair dragged at Cesare's heart. He convulsed with another effort to burst the winding sheet of doom. Abruptly he changed his body to tragedy, and, turning to the three cackling men, presented a crouched posture of ludicrous mourning.

"Signori, that she may love me, tell her of my grandeur. It is the grandeur of jaws that have the mumps. Tell her of the acclamations of the public. The claque did it gratis. Tell her of my great importance. It is the importance of a broken violin string in a brass band."

The three listening men were breathless now. No doubt could ever arise in their minds that Cesare had used his accidental stage triumph to play a fine comedy. The girl's melancholy face remained unmoved. Oh, that ghastly love-making! The old man sank to the bottom of hopelessness. He could never make her laugh. He turned and stumbled away. At the staircase he flung himself around, and raised his wings with an uncontrollable gesture of anguish.

"Tell them," he shrieked to the girl, "that I did presume to love you."

He leaped up the steps, while the men in the hall laughed in loudest clamor at this climax of droll roguery, and laughed again at the moodiness of the girl's half-closed eyes, thinking her nettled over the impertinence of the ancient clown.

In his room three flights up Cesare fell into a chair, and threw his arms and head upon the dressing table. He felt himself in a strange and ghostly world. A new career lay before him. Gibes and ridicule would be his daily fare. Faintly from the auditorium came a shrilling of two trumpets playing a minor second with a horn blowing a sensuous cadence underneath.

A STEP clicked in the hall. A figure stood in the doorway. The Congressman's daughter peered into the room. With his head lifted a little from the table, Cesare stared at her. Hatred gathered in his face. He leaned forward toward her with a snarling grimace.

"You have come to laugh at me so soon? Have you told the others—all of them—not forgetting one?"

She stepped into the room, restraining a laugh at the fantastic figure the crouched old pigeon made. Full of understanding, she had followed him to assure him that she would not reveal his ignominy.

"I shan't tell them."

He looked at the floor, and breathed loudly.

"They will never know. They think you are a wonder, and you are."

Cesare remained silent for many seconds.

The world cleared before him. The smoke of his perplexities blew away. His spirit returned to its bright elevation. He was a superior old fellow once more and he would receive months of admiration for the comedy he had played when the claque had made a mistake. He raised his eyes to the girl. Her lips were merry as she stood there, and her eyes were full of blithesome sweets. He pointed to a chair, and pulled his right arm out of its wing. With many witty circumlocutions and with an exquisite pantomime of the hand, he told the story of . . .

Luigi Barazzi was a first violinist who had so much scorn for his orchestra player's trade that in the pit he used only three fingers on the strings, the first three fingers of the left hand and never the fourth. But he was afraid he would lose the use of the fourth. Every morning he sweated at two hours of practice that exercised the neglected finger.

The girl's thickly rouged mouth stretched with laughter at every droll exclamation. Her head shook so hard that she had to take off her hat. Cesare's ugly gray eyes floated in a deep and gentle contentment.

Flowered Hat

By Margaret Widdemer

I WAS so sorry that she looked like that,
The poor old creature in the flowered hat
Too young for her tired, wrinkled face; too wide,
With too-bright roses massed on either side.

But she trod on, smiling contentedly,
As if at something that we could not see,
Till in a great store-window's gleam and flare
A mirror faced her, and she stopped to stare.

I tried to turn my own wet eyes away
Before she learned the thing the glass must say,
And still I watched, braced for her stabbed surprise.
But there was only, shining in her eyes,

A swift and rapturous child-vanity
Triumphant over our reality.

She had not seen that old face, dragged and lined—
For once, it seemed, God had been very kind:
After dull years of disillusionment
And days that could not go as young dreams went

The hat had called her back her own girl-face,
And, shadowed there beneath its flowers and lace
She saw, still undespoiled by time and pain,
By grace of those gay flowers—her youth again.

Everybody's Magazine, March, 1925

When the Road to Happiness Lay Through Despair

MARCH WINDS

From the Wreckage of the Life He Planned, Tommy Retires to Solitude to Build a Sure Foundation for True Happiness

By Francis R. Bellamy

Illustration by John R. Neill

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

TOMMY DUMBARTON faced the fact. He had to marry Diane. He was beginning to see that from the first that had been inevitable; from the first moment when he had lacked the strength to resist her. Maizie—what did she matter? He loved her—but he had never had a chance to win her. She had loved him once—on the Riviera. And he had not had sense enough to know he loved her, then. She had loved him again, for all the humiliation of her first discovery of him—loved him, trusted him. And then he had had to tell her of Diane, and she had cast him off. Not because Diane had tricked him into a situation in which tradition, honor, convention, had forced him to admit a lie—that they were engaged. But because he had had to confess that he had been Diane's lover.

Now—oh, well, what did it matter? Whoever you married, it was all the same in a few years! They'd go to the Vanity Club party tonight, and he'd tell her, and they'd be married at once, and go off somewhere—Spain, as he had suggested to Stork MacDowell—anywhere!

Stork! Good old Stork! He understood. He always had understood.

But how far was Tommy himself from any sort of understanding! One thing made marriage with Diane possible for him—his belief that she loved him; that her passion had come to be love. And yet for weeks, under his very eyes, she and his best friend, she and Stork . . . Had he known . . . But it was just that sort of thing Tommy would never know.

MANY tables and little food; exotically dressed, extraordinarily varied women; pink lights and wallpaper; crowds of loose-tongued, feverish humanity—men leaning far over tables, on their elbows, talking to girls; hurrying waiters; spotted tablecloths; imitation silver and cheap glasses; a display of coiffures, cosmetics, chiffons; matter-of-fact, sensual-faced men, eating and drinking, their eyes on the feverish crowd; painted, white-skinned women, smoking cigarettes, eyes half closed . . .

That was Tini's, that night—the destination of the Vanity Club.

To a Tolstoy there might have been something infinitely pathetic in the sight—humanity, divorced from its dream, escaping itself, drowning in alcohol the drab fact of its own dullness, fleeing the eternal problem of God and the Devil. But to the club there was nothing pathetic about it—and to Diane least of all!

To her, at eleven o'clock, the tables might have appeared through a slight haze—the well-known effect of John Barleycorn's influence—but the haze was one of pleasant sensation. Here were adventure, romance, excitement, all contained within the walls of a house! Tommy was certainly gay—filled with poetry, which he recited with enormous gestures! Henri Blyn sang exceptionally well to Jimmy's baton—a hat-brush, picked up in the hall! And Stork provided the touch of emotion—sitting opposite her, with his green eyes smoldering as he gazed at her steadily, significantly.

Why wasn't it a very good party?

It was the kind of thing, the sort of freedom she would have once she escaped the house at Rhinebeck forever—and was her own mistress! She and Tommy, going their own ways! A partnership of complete freedom!

"Boy," she said to Stork, "this is my idea of a good time!"

She raised her glass until her eyes were on a level with the Stork's—and then closed them, aware of a curious thrill, and an answering flash from the painter.

At the moment, there seemed to be a gradual breaking down of the bars of conventionality in Tini's. Strangers were becoming acquaintances, friends turning into intimates. The hour of midnight was coming. People were dragging chairs about, sitting down at other tables, drinking each other's health in dramatic, unsteady fashion! Elbows swept things aside. Bottles fell over. Roars of laughter swept the room occasionally.

"Are you still mad—from last night?" asked the Stork.

"Not—too mad," she answered with a half-smile.

"I wish we could get away from all these people."

"You're the impetuous youth, aren't you?"

"I'm crazy about you."

"Is that news?"

"It may be history—soon."

"Why?" She was all interest.

"I'm going to Spain."

"When?"

"Maybe next week."

"I don't think that's very nice."

"I haven't told any one else."

"I don't see—when you don't have to—"

"You won't care."

She picked at the tablecloth.

"Trying to make me jealous?"

"Maybe."

In the noise of Tini's Diane raised her eyes to his.

"Aren't you having a good time?"

"Such as it is."

She dropped her eyes.

"You just hold me off," he said somberly.

"Good night!" she said. "I wouldn't call it that!"

"You're always objecting—"

"You can't have everything—in this world."

"I don't give a damn."

The party was on the move.

"We'll have to go to Sylvester's." It was Diane's voice in an aside to Stork.

"Later," said Stork.

THE club surged out into the late night street, drowning of a sudden the noise of a distant elevated train and three chugging taxis with the shouted "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow!"

The harmony—or the lack of it—filled Bleecker Street as the members proceeded arm in arm up the street, up Macdougal Street to Washington Square.

Next came "Adeline, Sweet Adeline," executed about a hydrant.

"Sweet Adeline," said Stork, and he held Diane tightly to his side.

"A big night!" cried Jimmy. "On to the dance!"

The club untangled, swayed forward, climbed Sylvester's stairs, pushed the door open with much laughter—put on the lights, snapped them off again, started the phonograph, stopped it, started it again—put on the lights, plunged the studio in darkness.

"Come on with those lights!"

"Quit it, Jimmy!"

The scene at Tini's bade fair to be repeated.

Yes, it was a real party, Diane confessed to herself. She could jerk the lights out by the roots herself; she could crown Jimmy with that Chinese jar: that Italian wine had real authority.

Tommy would think it odd, in a moment, if she did not seek him.

"Come on, Di!" said Stork, as the phonograph sent forth a jazzy foxtrot, pulsating with rhythm.

"Why, Tommy—" she began.

"To hell with Tommy!" he said, and drew her to him.

"Oh, you Sandow!" she exclaimed.

He whirled her terrifically.

"Good night!" she said. "I'll come apart!"

"Put out the lights!" shouted the Stork.

In the darkness he kissed her, bent her back. "You little Cleopatra!" he said.

Faintness came to her. "Golly, I'm well illuminated!" she remarked.

"I feel immense," said Stork.

"The way they pull those lights makes me dizzy!"

"It's Jimmy's idea of a shadow dance!"

"Either put 'em out or on!" she commanded, suddenly imperious.

"All right," said Stork.

He reached up and grasped the cord, and gave it a pull that plunged the place in utter darkness and a shower of delicate glass. Laughter.

"I've got to sit down a minute," said Diane.

"Here's the divan," said Stork.

He lifted her suddenly into his arms and sat down with her in the pitch blackness. Time stopped—and their movements, even their breathing.

"By God!" said Stork huskily.

He rose, holding her in his arms, in the darkness.

"No," she whispered.

"Yes," he said.

He made for the door to the landing.

"They'll wonder—"

"They're drunk."

"Put me down!"

"All right!"

In the pitch-black hallway he put her down, closing the door behind him.

"You know, this is insanity."

"We'll only stay an hour."

"Maybe we'd better not."

"Do! I am insane for just an hour!"

"All right," she said. "But hurry!"

The sound of the door to the studio opening made her add that—she was conscious of it, even in the darkness.

"HELLO! Who's this?" It was Tommy's voice, from the doorway.

"Damnation!" Stork swore under his breath.

"Hell!" said Diane.

"Far be it from me to butt in!" Tommy was not sure whom he faced, yet.

"You aren't butting in," said Diane.

"Oh, it's you!" said Tommy. "I was looking for you."

"Why?" asked Diane. Her cheeks felt hot.

"Time we were going," said Tommy. "It's one!"

"The shank of the evening," said Stork.

"What's the hurry?" asked Diane.

"I'm serious," said Tommy. "You know your family—"

"Oh, to hell with my family!" said Diane.

"Let her have a good time, for once," said Stork.

"What difference does it make to you?" retorted Tommy, stung by the surprising hostility of the painter's tone.

"Why be a killjoy?" said Stork.

"You're lit, Stork," said Tommy, after a barely perceptible pause.

"I'm not going yet," said Diane.

"Oh, yes, you are!" said Tommy lightly.

"Don't pull me like that!" she exclaimed angrily, as he put his hand on her arm.

"It's really time, Di," said Tommy.

"Oh, forget it!" said the Stork contemptuously.

"Why, what's the idea?" began Tommy, a trifle irritated.

"Oh, you make me sick!" said Diane brutally. "Get out of the way!" Like a knife the cut of her tone was. "You're not my keeper, are you?" she said furiously.

She wrenched herself away from the hand he had put on her arm.

"Why don't you help me, Stork?" she cried. "He's hurting me!"

"Let up, Tommy," said Stork harshly.

"Shut up!" said Tommy.

"You're just jealous, that's all!" exclaimed Diane. "I don't belong to you—just because you were afraid to tell the family the truth—"

In the darkness she could not see his face.

"I'm going to do what I want to!"

"Come on, Di." It was the Stork's voice.

"Where are you going?" asked Tommy in an even voice.

"Smoke a cigarette downstairs," said Stork.

"Oh!" said Tommy.

For the first time something seemed to give way inside him.

"All right," he said. "Go to hell if you want to! I don't care!"

He turned suddenly and went into the studio, slamming the door behind him. . . .

Blinding anger. The sudden, bitter pang of the human being who is not wanted, who is left out, discarded—that emotion was in his heart as he stood an instant in Sylvester's studio. Jealousy, too, maybe, he admitted, as he stared at the dancers, and the cutting scorn of Diane's tone came back to him!

Diane could not bear to be controlled. She was still the same as she had been that day when she lost her childish temper at the Clintons' gardener and had thrown stone after stone into the greenhouse at him. Crash! Crash! Crash! She had been like a little maniac that day, unable to control herself!

That was her state now—intensified, probably, by Tini's and the Rhine wine! He should never have brought her down on such a party! She was not made for them. Small desires became magnified to her. She could fight with him, wound him, scorn him—because she wished to smoke a cigarette downstairs, with Stork.

She was like a little, mad girl.

Thus, for a moment, he tried to minimize the thing.

Then the confusion of the studio before him flung itself upon his consciousness, overlaid the scene in the dark hallway, forced recognition of its unmistakable character.

No party ever before like this, at Sylvester's! It bore a resemblance to a Bacchanalian riot.

Who cared about petty quarrels, anyhow? Afraid to tell the family the truth, eh? That was a cheap, nasty thrust!

Anger tore the veil from human pettiness.

"Let's dance, Bébé!" he exclaimed.

He swung her a little blindly into the laughing, dim crowd upon the floor . . .

Even at three o'clock, he had thought little more than that. A kind of pride in him, not to mention going home to any one. Diane and Stork could sit outside on the stairs all night if they wished! He did not care! They could all go home at dawn. He would not be the killjoy. He would not even go outside and ask her to dance.

"Where's Diane?" Jimmy asked him.

"Getting a breath of air with Stork," he replied.

The mere proclamation induced a kind of recklessness in him that sent him to the punch bowl, that induced him to dance yet again with Bébé, with Jerry.

It was that, perhaps, which roused him to a realization of the passage of time and of the forgetfulness of the hours which John Barleycorn had induced in him.

FIVE o'clock! Morning! And a good half of the party gone home unnoticed! Only Jimmy, Rudy and Bébé Cantor and Barry and the Russian girl revolving solemnly in the disordered studio to the unwearied voice of the phonograph!

Where were Diane and Stork?

The jumbled realization of all that sent him to the door, finally, and the empty hallway—and even down the stairs to where the cul-de-sac of Charlton Court stared grimly at him, its brick features hard and unrelieved in the dawn grayness except by one discouraged thin tree.

"For goodness' sake!" he said to himself, queerly.

Surprise at himself and his own forgetfulness mingled with the oddness of their absence.

"I wonder—" he began.

Then he crossed the street, bareheaded, and made for the far end of the street and the Stork's studio. Maybe the Stork had taken her home long ago, and was home in bed himself, while he had waited, in Sylvester's. A half-ironical grin crossed his face at that. He mounted the narrow stairs and banged on the red door of the painter's abode.

"Oh, Stork!" he called.

Silence filled the narrow hall.

"Stork!" he called. He beat again on the door.

"Is that you, Mr. Dumbarton?" a voice inquired from below.

Looking down between the banisters, he saw the broad face of old Casey, the janitor, with his inevitable black pipe.

"Mr. McDowell ain't here. A taxicab took him, a half-hour ago. I was bringing up the barrels."

"Oh!" said Tommy. "Was he alone?"

"Except for a lady," said the janitor, grinning.

"That's what I wanted to know," said Tommy.

"He told the driver to go to Jersey City—"

"Jersey City!"

In the dawn Tommy stared at the Irishman's face.

"That's the place," said the Irishman, spitting deliberately.

"But why Jersey City?"

"Well, 'It's the lady's choice!' says Mr. MacDowell. 'How do ye think I'll look as a married man?" he says. And he give that grin and drove off!"

"Lord!" said Tommy. . . .

He never forgot that moment on Stork's stair.

Blind unbelief, first—flaming unbelief at the vista so suddenly opened up before him—Stork—Diane stretching tapestry of deceit. How much? How long?

"Impossible!" he said at first, to the gaping face of Casey.

Then he was out on the street again, climbing the stairs to his own studio, in his brain sudden, remembered glimpses of what he realized now was the unimagined volume of the truth. That day in the Mauritanian Building, that night at Mori's, that Sunday at the Brevoort! New Canaan, his father's piercing eyes! The wind in the bedroom! Diane—not his property because he had been afraid to tell the truth!

In the silence of the studio the sharp bite of that tore his soul—and then he was out on the street once more, in his soul a sudden blinding glimpse of the whole truth. Diane, throwing aside that young Fortescue to take him—then throwing him aside to take Stork! Stork, too—bowing down before the god of his own licentiousness; calling himself his friend, but in reality a friend to no man but himself! He himself, drifting on the easy tide of sensuality and calling it tolerance! Pinning the badge of chivalry on the sleeve of deceit! Crucifying love on the altar of passion!

Tragic disaster. . . .

Like a blinding flash, the truth came to him as he sought a bench in Washington Square.

Maizie! New Canaan! Useless sacrifice! Before God!

Diane and Stork; Primrose Lane; Johnny Firth; his father in his dinner jacket; his mother; Plinty; Aegesippe Moreau; Charlton Court; the green hills and white houses of Cannes; the precise drawing-room—

And always Maizie!

Ah, yes! Maizie. . . .

"Lord!" he said. And he buried his face in his hands. . . .

LIKE some unreal adventure, some fever dream, the rest of that day always seemed. He telephoned Aunt Jocelyn's and closed off abruptly, his fear stunningly confirmed. He sat in the train to Boston; he sat in the Copley-Plaza, writing his three letters—to Mrs. John Dumbarton, Gigi Vazeeti, John Firth; he bumped across the city's narrow streets to the North Station; he sat in another train, staring out of the window at the old, familiar, New England landscape: the forest-clad, field-checkered hills, the swift-rushing, pebbled streams. Hour after hour, he sat, while ironical acknowledgment of the justice of what had happened, mixing with the simple anguish of realizing it, produced a kind of coma that deadened his perceptions, reducing the vivid bitterness of them, swathing him in a kind of grim mist.

He could easily have fallen into the pit of cheap, extenuating cynicism, in those hours, had it not been for the clearness of his vision and that passionate desire to see the truth which had come to him at last. But there was no place for cynicism in that, he knew. There were only two ways of viewing life, he remembered John Firth saying quietly, after one of those sessions of the Listeners Club, as they walked down Fifth Avenue: cynicism and faith. The prisoner behind his bars could see either mud or stars.

But there was no excuse for him to see only the mud. He had his glimpse. The fact that he had tempted Fate and had been justly dealt with was no reason for denying it. A man took the cards life gave him—and played them to the best of his ability. He did not damn the game, merely because he had lost, merely because he realized now that he had been a careless player.

Pride, reticence, the curtain each man hung over his soul lest the world should see; the headstrong ignorance of youth; the wisdom and understanding of age, that came only with experience and could not be passed on because the words held no meaning until life had touched them with its wand—all these had made it a new game to him, just as it was a new game for each generation.

Every word that Christ had left for mankind had been said to him time and time again. And yet the words had been meaningless to him, really, until Diane, Maizie, Stork, this whole wreck of folly which he had made of existence—until these had made him perceive their truth. Shining courage, the flaming innocence of youth—he had had those, too. But life had crumbled them also, as always happened until one learned their value, from experience, caught a color here, a high light there, from which to paint finally that banner of faith wherewith the old marched from the world! Ironical, perhaps, that he should see it, too late. But true for all that, and unchangeable. . . .

It was a gradual realization indeed of the value of Maizie, of John Firth, of his own father, that came to him in those hours. They built, he saw; they carried on. Women like Maizie, indeed—sweet, true, steadfast—built the foundations of existence anew with every day of their lives. Love had to be all or nothing. Faith and truth had to be all or nothing. Otherwise the foundations cracked and the house of life fell down—as it had just fallen down for him. This was the kind of thing that happened when each human being pursued his own desires, regardless of the world or of his friend. Loyalty disappeared—and with it, the bottom fell out of life.

God—and the faith and ideals of the fathers! Even Youth could not do without them. They were life itself—the invisible web of the genuine world.

He clung to that conviction rather grimly, indeed, as darkness came; and the mountains appeared; and, after incalculable hours, old Will Hopkins's face appeared in the dim light of the wooden platform at Stafford's Notch.

Yet its reality was as definite to him as the familiar roar of the stream by the bridge; as real as the white road between the rail fences, shadowed by the birches in the uncertain lights of the Ford car, as they climbed, climbed, climbed; and Will talked and he answered mechanically, and the keen night mists of the mountains surrounded them.

Stone fences, then; marching woods, clear stars.

The top of the world, and over.

Then the old gate and the rutted, winding track—and the rocky steps up the glade, still fairylike and mysterious.

"It ain't jest as you left it, mebbe," Will said in the darkness of the shack studio, as he fumbled with the bracket lamp by the door. "But it's clean. Sarah's a great hand at that. Breakfast at seven—I guess there'll be enough. Good night!"

He was alone at last, the only sounds the rattle of Will's Ford as it descended the road to the farmhouse, the ticking of the alarm clock Mrs. Hopkins had set going once more in its accustomed place over the rough fireplace, and outside the myriad-voiced silence of the mountains.

TOMMY awoke to the drifting scent of apple blossoms and May grass, of juniper bushes and new cedar tips. Sounds of oriole, thrushes and chewinks, and in the woods, catbirds and capricious chickadees.

Outside, graceful branches of oak embraced the sunshine, their cautious tiny leaves only half unfolded, still the size of the chipmunk's ear. Underfoot, in the neglected garden, a tangled growth of sweet-fern and tiger lily, of tiny violet leaves and dew-diamond-filled sedum sprang from the leaf mold. And, falling away toward the blue, hazy horizon, forests of chestnut, larch and pine, mountain-sides of birch, gray rocks and meadow, brilliant with sunshine and dappled with shadows of clouds, floating in fresh, summer, sparkling airs. Maytime in New Hampshire!

Like a poignant glimpse of forgotten beauty it seemed to Tommy as he took his way down to Will Hopkins's white house, across the pebbled stream, and sat down to breakfast in the well-remembered dining-room with its view of the pump and the oak trees. Exactly so it had all appeared that day sixteen years ago when he and Johnny had first seen it on that freshman year walking trip. Sixteen years! Before the Beaux Arts, or Aegesippe Moreau, before Rome or Charlton Court or Stork and the month they had built the shack; before Rheims, the Champagne hills, the Riviera, Maizie, Diane. . . .

Youth, fled forever. . .

He and Johnny, full of laughter. . . .

Well, Mrs. Hopkins looked older, he noticed dimly; little Clorinda had blossomed into a graceful, slender creature; there were deep lines around Will's eyes; his stubbly beard was grayer. But the place was the same. The same pails of water by the bench in the woodshed; the same old, painted, ticking clock; the same shining, round-bellied stove; the same geraniums, even, in the windows; the same harmonium in the parlor, surmounted by that almost forgotten model of Clorinda and the kitten.

Had Sylvester's ever really existed?

Oh, yes, he had come for a long stay this time, he told them—he had some work to do; no, Mr. MacDowell was not coming; if they didn't mind he wouldn't bother them for meals—if Mrs. Hopkins would just make out a list of easy things for him, and get it at the Corners on the next trip—Why, yes, he was going to turn the shack into a studio once more.

"But you don't mean you're goin' to cook!" Mrs. Hopkins protested.

"Why, I can take up his meals," Clorinda interposed.

"Of course," said Will.

"No," said Tommy.

"Yes," said Mrs. Hopkins.

"It would give me more time," admitted Tommy.

"No trouble at all," said Mrs. Hopkins, and settled it, in many words. Clorinda was home from normal school; it was a treat, pleasure to cook for some folks; she remembered the hot biscuits he and Mr. MacDowell had liked, and the chats on the porch, and Mr. MacDowell with his accordion at the Gallises' dance. . . .

The avalanche of sympathetic welcome drove Tommy from the breakfast table finally, and sent him up the mountain to the shack, oddly pursued by the past, aware of its curious indestructibility and yet filled with a passionate desire to destroy it, conscious of its bitterness and yet unable to keep from retasting it.

It is only for a brief space, indeed, that we can separate our thoughts from those thousand gossamer threads which bind us so invisibly and yet so inescapably to our past. A gesture, a scene, a faint perfume! And we have stumbled once more upon a silken strand and set the web shimmering in the sunset light of memory! An ancient recipe, read in the kitchen of a summer afternoon, and the form of Aunt Mary is once more before us, bending eagerly over the boiling kettle, in the long-forgotten summer kitchen in Vermont! A clock striking, and we are once more a freshman, leaning from a dormitory window in a New England college! A star, above a cedar; and in the star a girl's face, and love and youth can glimmer!

For Tommy, that spring, this connection between present and past was rendered doubly poignant by the existence of the rural free delivery. No sooner would he get his mind firmly off the past and securely fastened upon his work—he thanked his stars for those figures for the Mauritanian Building that spring—than the mail would arrive and he would be upset again for half a day.

His mother's letter first—and the clipping that fell out of it. He picked that up first and read it with curious care before he smoothed out his mother's letter. And he laid that down at the end of the first page:

> Dear Tommy:
>
> I suppose this is no news to you. For I suppose this is what your note about Diane's explaining meant. But of course I am simply stunned by the entire thing. I cannot understand it at all. It is too disgusting and cheap for words. No one believes the clipping in the least. Mrs. Jocelyn Shirley was telephoning everywhere all morning. And of course the Shirleys blame you. It has absolutely ruined all friendship between us. And your father . . .

HE WALKED the hills, after that letter's arrival, until dawn drove the red fox and the woodchuck to their boulder-guarded houses—and there came to him an entirely new view of the interlaced strands of existence, and the responsibility that attached to each thread. Then he gave up all hope of trying to forget what had happened.

"No words of yours," he wrote his mother, "can add to the regret I already feel."

And to his father:

"Thank God, a man can only make such an ass of himself once. I intend to stick it out here. Your letter is the only bright spot in the whole thing. Sometime, perhaps, I'll tell you the whole thing—not just now."

He posted the letters, aware of a first small lessening of his bitterness; of an intangible something beneath his father's short note which he had never noticed before; and of a kind of ironical relief over the marriage, after all. It was a travesty, of course; but it could have been worse. . . .

They were two of a kind, Stork and Diane. They would make their trail across the world together.

He turned to his work once more. . . .

Faith, work, and a gradual calmness—and in the end a conviction that did not falter, although the sunlight appeared to have gone out of life. That, indeed, he realized long afterward, was the story of his first weeks in Stafford's Notch, while he tried to paste together the torn pages of his life, tried to tell himself that he would start over with a fresh, blank sheet, and saw, finally, that he never could—that the name of Maizie was too deeply inscribed.

That name gave him some bitter hours at first, of course; nights when he sat alone by the lamp, unable to read. There were moments, too, when he realized the deep wound which Stork had made in his heart, and he felt for the first time poor in friends. Even then there were always the hours of daylight, to be filled with dogged work and the satisfaction of achievement; and if he worked hard enough, utter exhaustion came, and with it sleep.

So he passed the first May days.

Days of warmer sunlight came then, when the sight of the eternal granite was like a touch of balm; the sound of the distant cowbell a symphony of peace; the breeze that rustled through the woods, skipping across the junipers and boulders and leaping down the pines into the valley meadows, was like the clasp of a cool palm to his forehead.

Calmness came to him, and a measure of peace.

Work, and a flaming belief! Surely that was the solution. . . .

Only once did he falter. That was after he got John Firth's letter from Osage, Kansas:

> I've taken my old job on the General Board. As you'll notice from the letter-head, I'm pushing on our mission work again. But that isn't the reason for this belated letter. It's the tiny pricking of conscience that has driven me to it, finally. I had a letter from Maizie some seven weeks ago. She has broken her engagement to Bert Woodward. She did not feel it was right. A rather pitiful letter. I thought you would want to know. . . .

A lump came in Tommy's throat at that—at the sudden picture of the old Elephant; at the curiously vivid glimpse it gave of Maizie—still trying desperately to be fair.

Then the sudden fierce flame of hope which had leaped into his heart flickered out into terrific blackness; driven out once more by the memory of that evening in the high-ceiling apartment—by the remembrance of the mist in her eyes on the bench in Washington Square.

Well, she might not love Woodward. But he had lost her, anyway. She no longer believed in him.

FOR a week after that, no work was done in the cabin studio.

For a time, perhaps, Tommy faltered.

Then calmness came to him again, and with it the satisfaction which lies in achievement. And in his work he caught hold of himself once more. Month after month proved that, as there came to him gradually an increasing stream of commissions and the cabin in the mountains became a veritable studio once more. It was a kind of ripple of ephemeral fame which "Happiness" and "Mystery" had brought him, indeed, and his mail box reflected it even in Stafford's Notch.

He realized that the day the letter came from the New England War Memorial committee, inviting him to enter the competition for that heroic affair—and he sat down and told them politely but firmly that the day of competition was over so far as he was concerned. His experience with committees had been unfortunate and unprofitable and he did not care to add to it.

That was what he wrote them, and he considered the incident closed—only to receive another letter, two weeks later, saying that the committee had decided to seek sketches first instead of a competition. Would not Tommy accept a retainer of $500.00 and make them some?

He knew he had come back when he got that letter—knew he had come back and did not care much whether he had or not, except for the chance it gave him to do something fine.

"I can do something after my own heart this time," he told John Firth, on the Scotchman's first visit in August. "Something even Maizie might like!"

And he led the conversation in that direction—but with scant result.

The Elephant had not been in New York for many months until the week before. He had been in the Iron Range country of Lake Superior, arbitrating a strike and lending a helping hand to the struggling, poverty-stricken missionaries in that industrial land. He had not even written another chapter of his book; to say nothing of seeing Maizie!

"Why haven't you heard from her?" he inquired.

"We don't correspond," returned Tommy, with a touch of irony.

"Just why did you change your stamping ground, anyway?" inquired the Elephant.

"Oh, no particular reason," Tommy told him.

He had simply seen the futility of his existence in Manhattan. He had sickened of New York, and Sylvester's, and Mori's, and the rest of it. He had realized there was a goal in life, somewhere, that he was missing. He had not cared to end life as a vulgar-minded, disgusting old man, sitting in the Thespian Club window, watching the women go by. That was all.

He went on to tell the conclusions he had reached, as they sat on the rough porch, overlooking the tangled garden and the vista of distant mountains, dim under the stars.

"I saw an advertisement in the morning paper yesterday that made me realize it all over again," he ended. "Just something about a place in the country—peace and quiet, happiness and growing things, the children playing on the lawn, father and mother on the porch in the twilight. The kind of ad that Jimmy would declaim satirically, after the second drink! Bourgeois naïveté!

"And yet that's exactly what's the matter with all my crowd—we've gone too far from simplicity, from the simple things that are common to humanity the world over—we've lost touch with the deeper things that are life to a Chinese peasant farmer beside the Great Wall or to Will Hopkins down there or to a Flemish vegetable grower beside his poplars. My heart is really back in New Canaan, sitting on the porch with my grandfather."

"I see," said John Firth.

He sat silent a long time.

"The truth is, I suppose," he said then, "that you have gone through the disillusionment that precedes the religious experience. That's all. And come out, on top."

"Oh, yes!" agreed Tommy ironically.

"God looks after His own," said John simply.

"I suppose I shall achieve that view in time," said Tommy.

They dropped the subject.

TOMMY made a sustained effort to put Maizie from his mind and achieve John Firth's point of view. The effort to do so lay behind everything he did in Stafford's Notch that summer and fall.

He went home to New Canaan once—just before he started the figure of the Puritan for the Memorial Committee—and stayed as long as he dared; and then wrote Gigi to close the Charlton Court studio and send all his things to Stafford's Notch. He did not care to trust himself in New York.

"But you aren't going to make that cabin your only headquarters, are you, Tommy?" his mother inquired.

"I am," said Tommy.

"But it seems so funny!" she exclaimed. "Away so far from all artistic things and people—"

"I'm enough of an artistic ass all by myself," said Tommy grimly.

A remark that brought a strange expression into John Dumbarton's eyes—but no comment. His son had escaped Diane, at any rate, although just how or why remained a mystery he did not care to reveal. That was enough for the present.

"I've got some things that may help you with that Puritan figure," he told Tommy.

He brought from the old carved desk in the study the miniatures and silhouettes of the Dumbartons: 1695–1922.

"There's a trunk that holds all our history, too," he said. "I'll send it to you, now you've arrived at the age of discretion."

He watched his son off at the station with an expression of pride that no one saw.

"What difference does it make what happened between them?" he said to his wife as they sat afterward in the white-paneled dining-room. "Diane hung herself with her own rope, most likely!"

To which Mrs. Dumbarton said nothing for a long while. Then she rose with a sigh.

"But she might have been all right if he had married her and they had had a house there across the pond, with a studio where we could have entertained—and seen something of him, once in a while. I fear he will be an old bachelor."

"His life is his own," said John Dumbarton. "And he's only just come to maturity now. He's going to be a white Dumbarton after all. That's all that matters."

He realized that he was a little stiff now, nights, as he rose from his chair. . . .

Fall came then, in Stafford's Notch, and early winter, with all its incredible colors—purple dusks, and orange dawns; pale golden radiance of moonlight, early evenings, casting dark violet shadows on the ermine of the sparkling snow behind each tiny cedar; changing colors of silver and black as the moon rose higher in the flooded sky and night crept along the mountains. Dark blue mornings, when the distant fields were squares of white, and the forest stood at bay against the winter wind; gray afternoons, when all the world seemed colorless except for the distant horizon where lines of salmon and green outlined the purple edge of the hills.

Wind and rain then, and brown world again, seen through the driving spray across the reddish birch tree-tops, revealing a patch of snow left here and there among the water-soaked and drooping bushes where the birds hid.

Then, once more, the sun! And opalescent skies!

Clear, cold stars, and rising wind—and then tiny crystals of snow, falling, drifting, eddying down upon the frozen, rutted, pebbled New Hampshire roads, seeking out the interstices of the long stone fences, dancing on the drooping apple boughs.

Winter, once more!

For once, however, Tommy was hardly aware of it. He was hard at work upon his "Puritan," and he could see nothing else.

TO EVERY artist, perhaps, there comes a moment when the desire for great achievement lays hold of him and can no longer be denied. Rodin's "Portals of Hell," slowly gathering outline in his brain as he worked upon the great cathedral in Brussels and the vastness of the conceptions of the Middle Ages took hold of his imagination; Hardy's "Dynasts," gradually molding itself into shape as he wrote novel after novel, only to force recognition at last and come forth a fine work of art; Wagner's "Parsifal," final flower of a dominating faith.

Of like fruition was Tommy's "Puritan," rooted in his past, his youth and inheritance, expressing intensely his view of life, clear at last, impossible to mistake, impossible to resist, now it put forth its irrestible demand for recognition, claiming all his time and strength. Even as he developed it he knew that it would cost more than he could ever get from it financially, that it would require more than the Memorial possessed; but he could not stop then.

A glimpse of spiritual beauty, it was, that caught and held his imagination, just as the underlying mystery of night had held Whistler in its thrall, as the elusive mists of personality caught Conrad, the sheer beauty of line and surface intoxicated Manship. There was something in the Puritan's iron devotion to an intangible ideal that struck a deep chord in him now. There was a moving beauty in it as arresting, as real as any glimpse of youth or strength or divine mercy ever caught by any artist. New Plymouth had had a vision of the way to happiness—a vision of a land of the spirit, of happiness and brotherhood, like that one glimpsed along the Thessalonian shore when Paul once preached in Corinth.

It had spread almost unconsciously over all the land in the years since, as if a hundred spiritual streams from New England had watered the stretching continent of America—little streams of ideals, of religion, of philosophy, spreading out over the farms of pioneers from other lands like a new beneficent springtime Nile, leaving a seed of dominant culture that was not of blood but of ideas: a spirit that stood for character and self-restraint in 1920 as in 1620, a spirit borne along through the centuries by a thousand standard-bearers. each in his own way, according to his own soul.

That was what Tommy saw. And he strove to get it into the figure of the old Puritan by his wooden plow, with that indescribable expression of pride on his face, as he sees his spirit marching down his country's future: animating the pioneers and woodsmen beyond the Alleghenies;

living in the embattled farmers of the Revolution; in the men and women of the prairie schooners; in all the heroic leaders of the republic; to emerge, at last—across the Memorial Court—in that final glimpse of the A.E.F. crossing the seas to France, on the face of every figure unseizable kinship with the spirit of the Puritans—the genius of America.

A conception of heroic size, that memorial was!

There were few days that winter when Tommy could not have been found from dawn until dark and sometimes far into the night amid his endless drawings and sketches and half-done plaster models, around him the literature of the founders of the New World, while he worked, worked, worked.

Will Hopkins came and helped him with the plow. Gigi came and spent a month, departing then for New York to get Tommy the necessary assistants. Clorinda stood many weary hours while he modeled her young, graceful figure. Even his father came and spent a silent three days in taciturn exultation.

From New York the members of the clan made separate pilgrimages: Jimmy, Rudy, even Barry; all except Stork. Many hours of tremendous argument there were then, of course. It was illustration, Rudy complained. The figure was really that of an old hypocrite in a cocked hat, Jimmy asserted. It looked much like Mr. Volstead, Mallock remarked. He could never do so much bas-relief, Barry grunted.

Many hours!

But for Tommy conviction was really come, now, and he knew that life was but a kind of spiritual river, moving down shifting, changing sands that held moments of beauty and wonder. What he was portraying was the spirit behind things, visible through the things themselves. And he was satisfied. Behind his ideas, he knew, was the groundwork of the real artist—years of dogged work and endless study of effects. He knew just why he did each thing—no amount of chaff could shake him out of that. And he had not strayed outside the field of visual art. He knew more than to do that. The thing was simply the result of his moment of ecstasy, his perception of life's significance in spiritual terms. And if he could make it so, he would give it an overtone that would be tremendous.

"I'll convince every one of you in the end!" he said good-humoredly. After the first visit, they ceased to talk. . . .

Jimmy even came back for a week, later in the winter, and spent four days trying to find out what was the matter with the Puritan's hat.

"The old bird shouldn't have any!" he asserted in the end.

"You're right," cried Tommy, and felt, in his heart, that perhaps he had been too hard upon his friends.

Perhaps he alone had been the only really egregious ass! There was something fine beneath Jimmy's boisterousness, after all.

TOMMY did not know for some time of the visit that John Firth made to Maizie's apartment on Ninth Street, early in January.

A shining flame of unselfishness it was that the Scotchman carried in his soul, lighting up for him always his ideas of duty and honor and obligation to his friends. In this instance loyalty to Tommy moved him.

He had had an intuitive conviction for months, now, that more had taken place between Tommy and Maizie than had ever appeared on the surface—that more than a simple refusal of a proposal of marriage was at the bottom of a separation which had been complete ever since the day when Tommy had returned from New Canaan. There was no knowledge in him, of course, of any of the particulars of the story. But disillusionment and religious conviction, he well knew, did not come full-blown from a furnace of generalities. They were made from the very stuff of life itself: personal experience. Tommy had had some such experience since he and Maizie had parted; and it had changed him. There might be a world of meaning in that fact for Maizie.

It was his only thought the day in early January when he went up to see Maizie, in the bright winter afternoon of the first Sunday after New Year's.

"I've been meaning to come round for some time," he told her. "But I seem to be at the beck and call of many people on these moments in New York. I apologize!"

She was a little thinner, he thought, with a faint pang; her color seemed somehow to be more subdued, too. But her eyes were the same as she answered:

"I don't know why you should apologize!"

"Because of your letter," he said at once.

"You answered that—very nicely," she said after a pause.

"I only wished I could have done so in person."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," she replied, with unconscious cruelty.

"I suppose not," he admitted.

"Oh, I didn't mean that way, Johnny," she said with instant contrition. She played with the reddish gold cat on her lap for a moment. "It wasn't anything any one could help on. Just a realization on my part—that it wouldn't ever be fair to Bert, and that—that we did not see things just the same way." She looked up swiftly, her brown eyes full of emotion. "I don't mean to disparage Bert. No one could be nicer. But he—he just intensifies my faults. We really almost fought about Cliff."

"Was that why you broke the engagement?" John Firth inquired.

Almost a blush spread over Maizie's face.

"No," she admitted. "I mean—not entirely. I didn't think it was—fair, somehow. I didn't love him—that way."

"Oh!" said Johnny.

"And I thought he would make me more—more self-righteous than I am already. I just hate myself sometimes. I wish I could be a murderer or something—instead of just wanting an ideal." She hesitated an instant. "That was partly why, too."

"I'm glad," said Johnny.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I was afraid it might be an—an impulse or something—a thing you'd regret—the kind of thing Tommy is always doing."

"Oh!" she said, and fell silent.

"I saw Tommy a couple of weeks ago," he remarked.

"Is that so?" she returned rather steadily.

"Up at Stafford's Notch. I spent a week with him."

"Oh, is he still there?"

"He's made it his only studio now."

"That must be very interesting."

"Tommy's an odd character, isn't he?"

"Sometimes," she said, after a barely perceptible pause.

"It was very interesting to me. You know, I've always wanted to be an artist, I think. More than ever now. Principally because it becomes clearer to me with every day how much personality counts for in it—how definitely belief shines through everything a man does. Every advance seems to be the result of that one thing: some genius sees things differently, definitely—like a Chekhov or a Cezanne, if you like—and gives us a technique and a view that is striking. The imitators follow them, of course, mostly without the philosophy or personality, imitating just the form, producing a flood of empty ignorance, on canvas or in print—and then along comes another genius, with something new to say or see!"

"I suppose so," murmured Maizie. There was something oddly quiet in her manner.

"Tommy's a fine example of genius at work just now," said Johnny Firth. "He's doing a really inspiring figure of the Puritan and the Puritan spirit down the centuries. It is remarkable, the grip the thing has—I think because he believes it. I talked to him a good many hours. He could never have done it two years ago. I think now he is going to be a remarkable artist—because he has a glimpse of spiritual beauty. Where he got it I don't know—but it's the kind of thing the critics will quarrel violently with, and refuse to recognize, and then finally enshrine."

"I hope so," said Maizie.

She was looking at John Firth intently.

"I firmly believe it," said John. "Tommy has changed. People do, you know."

"I wonder," said Maizie.

"I know it," said Firth.

There was something tense in the way Maizie clasped her hands and stared at them. Then she looked up at John.

"Could you ever make me sure?" she asked.

"YOU quarreled, didn't you?" asked the Elephant.

"Yes," said Maizie, in a barely perceptible tone.

"I thought so," said John Firth.

"Did Tommy tell you?" she asked.

"Tommy said nothing," answered John Firth. "But I knew."

"Did he mention me?"

"Once."

"I've wondered ever since if I was right," she said. "But I suppose it makes little difference now."

"What makes you say that?"

"He hasn't come to see me. And that—that Diane Shirley, I saw, married Stork MacDowell. I suppose he has his reasons."

She trailed off into silence, odd repression manifest in the way she clasped her hands, in the curve of her cheek, in the set of her chin—a repression that sent an unexpected pang into John Firth's heart.

"There's probably a misunderstanding," he said.

"It was perfectly clear," she answered.

"Does he know you want to see him?"

She unclasped her hands suddenly and clenched them about her knees.

"I don't know whether I want to see him or not," she said, with a pitiful kind of serenity. "I mean, whether I'd better!"

She tightened her hands over the perplexity of it, just as she had done ever since that moment in Washington Square when she and Tommy had parted.

"You see," she went on, "it's that I don't know if, perhaps, I'm not a coward, afraid to face life—to take its bitterness with its sweetness; if, perhaps, I'm not looking for perfection so that I can seize it and run away with it to some retreat where I can be happy."

She told him, while he sat silent and only interrupted once: when Diane and Tommy in Primrose Lane were reached.

"That's like Tommy," he said.

"But that's why I feel so torn," she pointed out. "I realize it's like being a woman who won't face poverty or children—I can't face this. And yet I don't feel, somehow—as if I could stand it. It would be like selling my ideal of life just to gratify my own emotions. And he hasn't come here—even since this Diane and Stork thing that was in the newspapers. It's like selling myself—for half-price."

"I UNDERSTAND," said John Firth. "There is no happiness without fine character. And yet I think that's just what Tommy can acquire—with help. Happiness and perfection and character don't come full-blown, you know. I'm a little penurious, a shade of a miser yet, I find—because of my boyhood. You don't get anywhere without a journey. And in life half the journey seems to be the companions who go on it with you. A good son is a gift to the world that comes after you. But a fine husband, I suppose, is usually another woman's gift to you. And a fine father is usually your gift to your children." He hesitated. "We have to fight for our ideals in this world, you know—or they die within us."

"I suppose so," murmured Maizie. "Everything dies, without use."

"I think Tommy's your job—if you love him, and think you can help him. It's life's great responsibility."

"If one has courage enough to tackle it," said Maizie.

"Which you have," said John Firth. "Your father didn't live in vain."

"No," she admitted. "He is one of my proofs of God."

"All Tommy needs is an influence."

"Any influence!" she said, with a tinge of sadness.

"Not now," said John Firth. "He's awake to himself. He's changed since college days. We used to call him the 'Well, I guess that's right!' man in Cambridge. But he's grown up. Religion is his sign of maturity. It takes a man thirty years to get over just being smart. Tommy's got a glimpse now that he won't lose. His mistakes are behind him. Personally, if I weren't a minister, I'd bet on him. I think you could achieve happiness with him—with courage. Men with his flame don't happen every day."

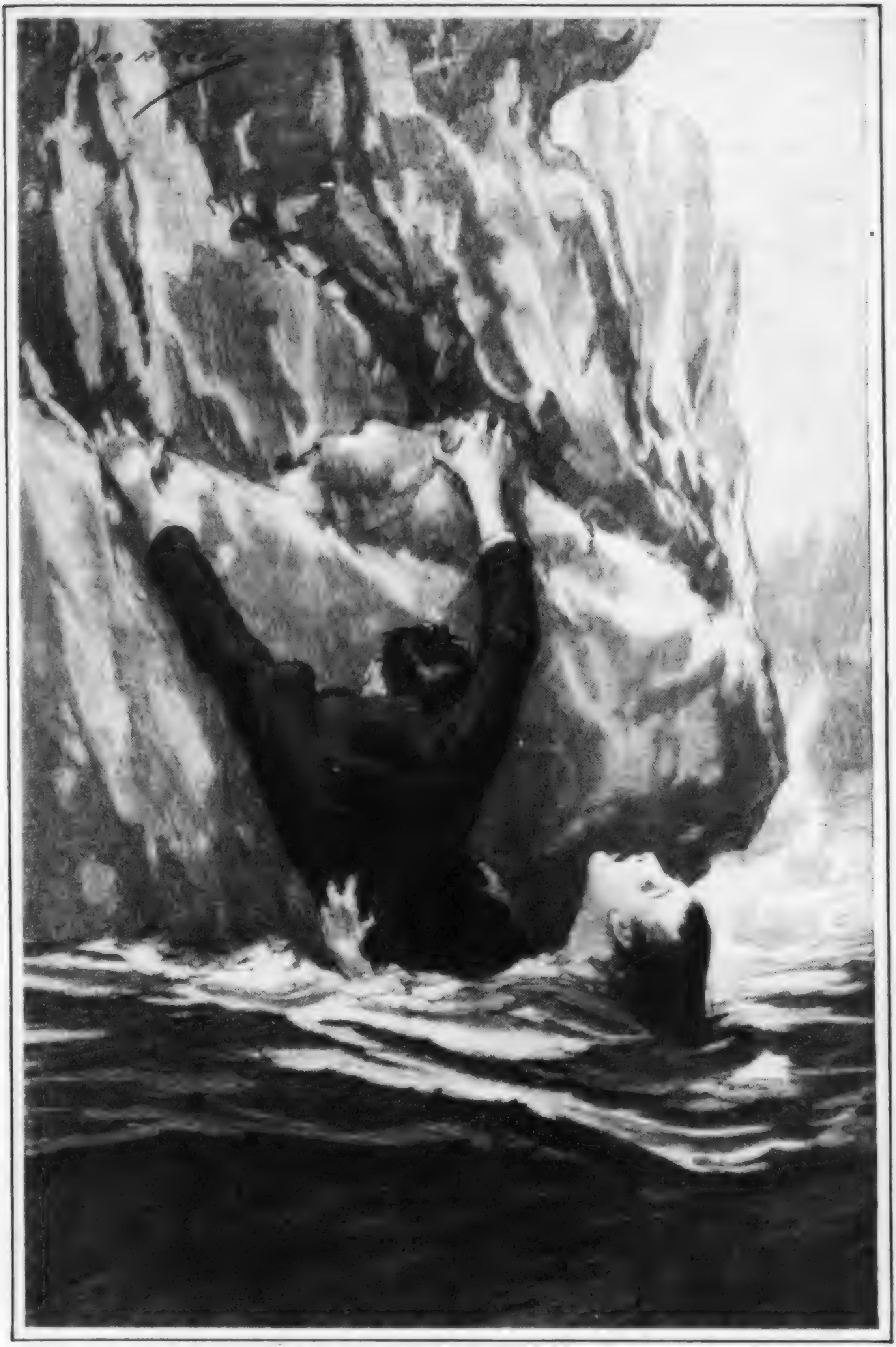
"I suppose not," said Maizie, with tightly clasped hands.

"I'm sure of it," said the Elephant, "even though I realize my responsibility."

She watched him go down the stairs with an emotion she never forgot—an emotion that was a mixture of regret and admiration and poignant loneliness. Why indeed could not he have been her Prince Charming? Not Tommy! And their romance made up of summer nights, driving the sweet country roads, as her mother and father had done before her; their life, another house near Highland Drive, with more lilacs and smooth lawns and on the porch—children?

The thought took her by the throat as she turned back into the apartment and tiny spots of crimson came in her cheeks.

It was almost the only thought she had until that day when she saw the headlines in the *Times;* and took the first train for Stafford's Notch, in her heart the paralyzing fear that, in the end, she had waited too long. . . .



"Let go and grab me—and climb up on me!" he shouted. Suddenly she obeyed; his wrists were almost breaking.

TOMMY'S meeting with Stork preceded that, of course, by nearly twenty-four hours.

"The critters have busted clear through this time, I guess," Will Hopkins told Tommy as they walked along in the woods.

He paused to light his pipe on the top of the divide, where the mountain-side overlooked the Upper Branch, mad with spring, roaring and swirling its way deep in its cañon through the birch and chestnut glen. Beneath their feet the sodden leaves still held the earth imprisoned. Shiny tree-trunks dripped beside them.

"I'll go up," Will added, "and you go down!"

They separated, in search of Will's young stock, which had broken out of pasture and scattered through the woods.

It was one of those early May days when all the snow is gone, and yet spring has not arrived. Spots of green upon the sloping fields; mud upon the roads; swelling reddish tips upon the willows and the gleaming white of birch tree-trunks beside the fences. Everywhere, sodden leaves—refuse of the winter's recent retreat. But still no sign of summer; no touch of warmth. A landscape, lying brown and wet and cold, beneath a sky of cloudy gray, untouched by the bright glow of the hidden sun—a sky that threatens rain or snow, or that hybrid of the devil: sleet.

A gentle, icy rain had begun to fall, indeed, even as Tommy descended the winding glen, and the curious half-memories which rain always brought him made their appearance in his brain: the gray, ruffled pond in New Canaan; the violet-red, dripping woods of Luxembourg; the gleaming birches by the Nest; the shining Paris boulevards at night; the dark, muddy streets of war-encircled Chalons; Charlton Court, red-bricked, discouraged; that café in San Rafael, and the driving rain upon the windows. . . .

He banished the thought, for the thousandth time, as he stood a moment searching the sodden ground for traces of hoof prints, listening for the sound of crackling branches, and looking through the tangled woods for a sign of color or life.

No sound of browsing cattle reached him, however, and he made his way farther.

Below him, nearer now, the Upper Branch roared and swirled even louder in its deep-walled bed. But he did not pay much attention to it. The unmistakable, half-sweet, half-acrid smell of woodsmoke had assailed him. And he felt the wind a moment, standing absolutely still.

Like a statue he was, of a sudden. And it was that continued immobility, perhaps, that enabled him to catch a glimpse, through tangled limbs, of a square splotch of black and white moving in the forest.

"Hello!" he said. "They're here!"

The next moment, the Stork stepped out of the woods into clear view before him.

Dressed in gay-checkered, black and white knickerbockers and Norfolk, he was; and with an indescribable air of material prosperity that seemed somehow to coarsen his face. Only his grin and his green eyes seemed the same.

"Hello, Tommy," he said, after an almost indistinguishable pause; and he walked slowly toward him.

"Hello," said Tommy.

In the spring woods poignant memory gazed upon uncertainty.

"I'm up at the Montagues', on a house party," said the Stork.

He thrust his hands into his pockets, of a sudden—perhaps at the lack of any sign on Tommy's part that he meant to shake hands.

"I thought I might see you," he added.

"Did you?" said Tommy. His voice was very even.

"I've been in town about six months—but you didn't show any sign of returning."

"No," said Tommy, "I haven't."

"I MEANT to write you," said the Stork abruptly—it seemed to be difficult for him to speak; "but somehow, I couldn't."

"I suppose not," said Tommy.

"Do you hold it up against me?" said the painter.

"What?" said Tommy.

"Diane," replied the painter without flinching.

"No," said Tommy. "That's just you, I suppose."

A dull red overspread the painter's features. "There's no use being rotten about it," he said.

"All right," said Tommy.

"Good Lord!" said the Stork. "There's no sense in a girl spoiling a friendship. You weren't in love with her!"

"No," said Tommy, "I wasn't."

"You ought to have been glad of it!"

"I am," said Tommy. "I know where I stand now."

"Because I didn't tell you?" asked the Stork.

"It isn't my idea of friendship," said Tommy slowly; "or loyalty—or truth."

"You'd be married to her now, if I hadn't stepped in," said the painter, fiercely.

"Maybe," said Tommy.

"I don't see your kick."

"I haven't any," said Tommy.

The painter hesitated. "Come on over to the Montagues' with me," he proposed.

"No," said Tommy, "I guess not."

"Sore?" inquired Stork.

"I've lost faith in you," said Tommy. "If you'd take one woman, you'd take another. If you'd steal one thing, you'd steal another. There's no bottom to life—with you."

The Stork clenched his hands suddenly. "I wouldn't have taken Maizie—" he began.

"Maybe."

"But I needed Diane—"

"Just as she needed you, I suppose," said Tommy ironically.

"No," said the painter with an effort. "Financially."

"Oh!" said Tommy. A curious expression came to his eyes. "Was that why you did it?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Stork.

"It makes a peculiar foundation for happiness," said Tommy.

"Happiness! With Diane?" the Stork inquired satirically.

"Does she know it?"

"She doesn't care," said Stork.

"Money!" said Tommy, with an odd intonation.

"I'm forty," said the Stork.

"I'd have lent you money."

"You've done enough for me."

"Good Lord, Stork!" said Tommy abruptly.

"That's the truth," said Stork. "I wouldn't tell it to any one in the world—but you."

"Why do you tell it to me?" inquired Tommy.

"Because you're the only friend I ever had," said the painter. In the rain he turned up his coat collar suddenly. "I only used Diane's tactics on herself," he said.

"Maybe," said Tommy doubtfully.

"Maybe?" echoed the Stork.

"I'm not so ready to condemn her," said Tommy.

"Come down here a minute with me," said the painter grimly.

"Where?" asked Tommy.

"To the edge of the gorge."

"Why?"

"I want to show you something."

"You mean about Diane?"

"Diane," the painter answered.

He strode down the glen, through the leaves and wet branches to where a jutting rock and pine tree gave a view of the gorge below.

"We're all out on a picnic," he said. "Look down there."

He pointed to where the rocky shelf on the lower side, at the cañon's gloomiest depth, held a small woodfire, and beside it a man and girl. There was something infinitely poignant about that scene to Tommy—a poignancy that proceeded not from anything recognizable in the two, at that distance, but from the simple fact of that sheltered woodfire in the rain—intimate companions—happiness!

Lovers—love, still in the world!

The girl's back, covered with a gray sweater, was toward them; and the man's hat shadowed his face. But even from that height it was clear they were not of Stafford's Notch.

Sophisticated lovers, but lovers for all that.

HOW reminiscent was that gesture of the girl! How tender the man, as he tucked around her ankles a raincoat from the ledge! Inviting, the girl, as she laid one cheek upon her knees! Desirous, the man, as he came close, ruffled her gray hat a little roughly, and then slipped his arm about her waist while she struggled—oh, so slightly!—and then stared in the flames.

"Diane," said the Stork grimly.

"Good night!" said Tommy.

To him there came a clear conviction—or would have come but for a sudden, a dramatic change in the scene below.

A sudden kiss; another—given to the man, by the girl! A quick embrace!

Then Diane was on her feet, agitated, twisting in her hands the light gray muffler she wore, while the man looked up at her from the fire.

"More of her damned dramatics, I suppose," muttered the Stork.

"She'd better watch out; she's close to that edge," said Tommy.

Words then—inaudible above the rush of the solid, black torrent—but unmistakable words of passionate import: their character evidenced by the gestures, Diane's posture, her clasped hands!

"She's probably threatening to drown herself unless Bobby Powers loves her," said Stork satirically.

"Good Lord!" said Tommy. "Look!"

Down below, Diane had turned swiftly by the torrent's edge, only to catch her foot in a rift in the rock, to stumble, slip on the wet stone.

"She's in!" exclaimed Tommy.

"By God!"

In the solid, black stream the gray muffler elongated, white hands grasped unavailingly at the slippery walls, spots of white spray boiled in the torrent.

"You slide here!" shouted Tommy. "I'll slide down below!"

"You can't get her now!"

"It's us or nothing!"

"Don't drown yourself!"

"Nobody else can reach her!"

With the words he was already started—running obliquely but swiftly down the sloping face of the ravine; his feet plowing into loose pieces of slate, spongy mosses; his hands grasping bushes, trees, branches, anything to guide his descent.

Thin branches whipped his face, blinded his eyes. Unseen splinters tore at his hands. A bush snatched off his hat. He ran full tilt into a large pine. He swung round it. He staggered, banged his knees, rolled, got to his feet again. He slid in a shower of slate.

He was on the lower level, gasping, blinded, his ears full of the roar of the torrent beside him, just below him.

"Fool!" he said.

He brought up with a perilous slip and fall, a breathless clasping of the icy ledge that hung over the water—and the next instant was crawling out on it like some ungainly beetle, pushing for the jutting corner where the water boiled and eddied, striking the rocky wall again and again, in great circles, to plunge swiftly at last toward the near falls whose spray rose high in the air—nearly as high as the crags beyond, where the lower gorge began.

ONE swift glance, indeed, had told him the truth. There was no one in that stream above. Diane had sunk; or she was below him here, clinging to this ledge, perhaps beneath it, perhaps an inanimate body.

Sweat broke out on his face; his hands were numb; his knees ached.

But he made the tiny angle, rounded the corner standing up now, embracing the wall closely and swinging himself around where the ledge came to a point and vanished for a foot. Then he saw her: twenty feet away, almost buried in the boiling water beneath the ledge around the slight, irregular circle, her dark hair awash, showing a singularly white spot of neck, her two hands clutching the rough ledge above her desperately, her face against the wall, her body swept in and under the shelf by the irresistible violence of the black current.

Incredibly strained hands, slender wrists, blue-white with cold! Tenuous hold upon existence! Beastlike, relentless, black rushing water!

"Hang on!" he shouted hoarsely, again instinctively.

But his own voice had vanished now, lost in the gasp of his breath, inaudible five feet away, in any event—inaudible, in that inferno of water and sound, five inches distant!

His strength and determination remained, however—almost intact, he realized, with the sudden accession of power which opportunity or necessity gives. Like that moment, near distant Rheims, when he and Papa Benoit had given the ammunition truck that last incredible push, amid the crash of shells in the ruined village street!

"Hang on!" he muttered.

Oh, for another foot upon that ledge! For a rock, a tree, a bush! For anything to hang to, to give him solid hold! Instead of the bare, icy, black shelf, with a slight tilt downward.

He gripped her wrists, far up the forearm, and knelt over her, shouting down below the ledge, into the flying dark hair:

"Can you pull yourself up if I help you?"

She heard, but could answer only with a shake of the head: a head she could not raise, a head whose forehead and temples she with difficulty kept from crashing on the lower edge of the shelf with every change of violence of the torrent.

"I'll pull you," he shouted.

He grasped her beneath the arms, could not hold, seized her wet shoulders, found no grip except on a tearing, giving sweater, sought her armpits again.

"Raise yourself so I grip your arms."

He was still on his knees, leaning far over, aware of the tremendous strain any weight would be in such a position—but she shook her head despairingly, even as the tug of the current pulled her almost beneath the ledge and her forearms, against the stone, seemed to bend almost to the breaking-point.

"Dear God!" said Tommy. He gripped her by the wrists, leaned over and pulled. "Let go," he shouted. "I'll haul."

On his neck the veins swelled; his arms were suddenly torn almost from their sockets—and with a slight crash he felt himself pulled sideways as the girl's white hands released the rock. Down, down, down! And not up!

An instant he stared about him; then he was clambering over the edge himself, beside her in the water, below her.

"Let go and grab me around my waist—and climb up on me!"

He shouted it with all his strength, into her black, streaming hair. He shouted it again. He swore.

Suddenly she obeyed, and he felt her clutching him, he felt his arms and hands straining, his wrists almost breaking. She was hugging his back; she was gripping his shoulders; her legs were wound about him; she was on his thighs; her knee was in his back—

She was almost choking him with one hand; she was half on his shoulder; she must be half up; her foot sought his hip wildly—swinging water, plunging beast, relentless devil of a ledge, irresistible power of Nature. . . . He could feel one knee on his shoulder now! She must have her elbows on the ledge now! Why, oh, why, didn't she hurry? He could not stand that much longer!

"Lord!" he said.

OF A SUDDEN he realized that one hand had pulled free—was tearing down at him, rocks, the ledge had cracked—he swung sidewise, under. Blackness enveloped him, water pushed him, things tore out of his hands, he held his breath grimly, blackly, with set teeth, he shoved with his feet, he doubled his arms over his skull—and then he knew he was going downstream, in a roar of water, pulling, sucking currents, uprising rocks, incredible caverns, swift boiling foam.

Yes, there ahead was the crag, the spray, the falls!

He was not dead yet!

Only a piercing pain in his right side—or was it his leg?

"To die with your boots on!"

By some mysterious trick of memory the refrain of that French song crossed his brain; the filthy convent hall in Epernay; that dirty water in the street; Maizie trailing her hands in the water at San Rafael; Stork and those rapids on the Saranac, the chute of the lumbermen.

Water; black hair; white hands—

Like Diane—

Poor in friends; a glimpse of God; ridiculous humanity—Diane— Throwing himself away again upon her!

Another joke for his father, for Stork, for them all—the last, perhaps—because he had kissed her once!

He must cover his skull against the sharp rock!

He gripped it suddenly, uncanny strength in his fingers, uncanny shrewdness in his hammering brain—lee water, breath—and knew he was on the edge of the falls, across that swift-rushing spot where the shelf of the cañon stretched out to the brink, where he and Stork had once foundered, fallen, fought their way across. Lee water by this rock, nevertheless. He could hang on, awhile—a long while, perhaps; help could come—if she had got up on the ledge.

Or that man! What had become of him? A short, little man—no use! A broker, perhaps—no use in this gorge!

What different qualities life and death required!

He closed his eyes in the lee of the rock, with his back against it, his feet he knew not where—closed his eyes and drew his breath slowly, painfully, and then with increasing ease; moved his right leg, went faint with pain, turned his face to the rock— And waited . . .

Roar of the torrent; steady boom of the falls; fine mist—or was it tiny particles of ice?—falling on his head, his hands—cold hands—cold thighs—blanched lips . . .

All broken up, anyway, probably.

It was his last conscious thought . . .

He never knew until afterward, indeed, how long it was that he must have clung to that rock, how long it was before Stork came down that narrow causeway across the gorge—followed by the little, short man and many others—how long it was before the painter got to him, in the icy dusk, his hands cut and bleeding, his chest chafed with the heavy ropes that the crowd upon the bank held.

He thought they were still in the Adirondacks—he and Stork—in that gorge of the Saranac, by Katyville—youth and heroism—still playing in that vacation of their youth—and they had had an upset.

Not indeed until he awoke, finally, on the couch in the rough studio on the heights, did he know all that had happened.

Then fever had caught him and the whole thing was like a phantasmagoria—Stork beside the bed, Diane, pale and ghostlike, the little fat man in the knickerbockers, Clorinda by the window, the doctor stroking his beard—and in the doorway a perfectly strange young man.

"Who's he?" he asked, with one of those odd bewilderments of the sick.

"A reporter," said Diane.

He noticed that her hands were white and cold-looking—all torn and scratched.

"Well, put him out," he said feebly—and grinned. He turned his head to the wall for sleep.

"I can't stand it," said Diane. He knew she was weeping.

She was kneeling beside the couch.

"Well," he said, with another grin, "better than a stranger—"

The room faded from his sight.

"I guess I'm sick," he said.

The doctor cleared the room of all except Clorinda.

"We'll depend on you," he said, stroking his goatee, "until the nurse from Portsmouth gets here."

IT WAS thus that Maizie found him, late that next afternoon; in her hand, still, the New York paper with its inconspicuous announcement "Sculptor Risks Life to Save Girl Who Jilted Him"—and in her heart still the paralyzing fear that she might be too late.

That fear, indeed, had overshadowed everything for her, during those hours on the train, during those moments while she was being driven in the rattling old Ford up the ice-encrusted hills to Will Hopkins's place. Like some baleful manifestation of a personal enemy the increasing, blinding, bitter sleet storm had seemed—slowing down the train, filling with uncertainty her taxi ride across Boston, dragging unceasingly at the slow local train to the Notch.

She had felt a sudden blind hatred of the gleaming, silvery gray mist, the dripping woods, the clogged switches, the hanging icicles, the low-hanging clouds.

But not until she stood on the station platform in the Notch had full realization of its possibilities come to her—full realization of the barrier the storm might present.

The relentless strength of Nature—opposed to her further progress, sending trees crashing across the roads, rendering dangerous the curves, impassable the boggy frozen valley cuts, slippery and uncertain all movement on the earth!

A crude, new world, sculptured by the devil in ice!

"Dunno whether we'll git there or not," the driver had said. "But I got an ax and crowbar."

"We'll have to get there," she anwered.

"A relative, I s'pose?"

"Yes," she answered without a qualm.

The uncertain, swaying, sliding, crackling ride had begun—a ride which she could hardly believe yet, as she stood in the doorway of the studio, her gloves sopping wet, her skirt torn, her left cheek an angry red with tiny scratches.

There was only one real question, indeed, in her heart.

"He's sleeping," said the nurse.

"I'll wait," she said. "I've come from New York."

"We think he's better," said the nurse.

"Thank God," she said. Her eyes filled suddenly with tears. "I'm Miss Delafield."

"Oh!" said Clorinda. "I'm glad," she said. "He told me."

And they opened the door to Tommy's room. . . .

THE END

Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

WITH no redeeming idiosyncrasy such as murdering babies, leading a pet lobster down the boulevard or dwelling in the Sahara disguised as an Arab, Stephen Vincent Benét ("Canned Salmon," page 30) complains of a life devoid of adventure.

He was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, July 22, 1898, and thus narrowly escaped being named Dewey. The name Benét is Spanish, or rather, Minorcan, as the family originally came from the island of Minorca to Florida, probably, as Mr. Benét says, as day laborers! An imitative small boy whose large spectacles kept him out of most games, he decided that he, like his brother William Rose Benét, would be a poet and wrote various sanguinary ballads that have fortunately perished. The family always encouraged, understood and helped him, no matter how silly the things were that he wrote—he never was allowed the luxury of feeling himself Alone and Misunderstood among Jeering Relatives, alas! In the spring and summer of 1915 when he was tutoring for college, he began to write more or less regularly with some faint idea of what he was trying to do.

He was lucky enough to enter Yale when the Yale Press, the Elizabethan Club, Johnny Farrar and other forces were working out a sort of Revival of Literature. He became chairman of the *Lit*, and Literary Editor of the *Record*. The war came and broke things up, but the winter after the Armistice he went back, and graduated in June, 1919. After three months of supporting himself by writing about tender bleeding gums and sweetheart soap, he went back to the Yale Graduate School and took his M. A. degree. He had been awarded a scholarship for foreign travel and study but it wasn't big enough to live on very long. So for the first time in five years he tried to write serious prose. He wrote "The Beginning of Wisdom" in the summer of 1920. Then to Paris, where he met Miss Rosemary Carr of Chicago—and the rest of his history is in her hands!

LITTLE of the atmosphere of teas, dinners, and drawing-rooms that go to make "Conquest" (see page 51) such a charming story is to be found in the author's account of her life, in which she rigorously avoids the capital *I*. Still, in both Jay Gelzer strikes an unmistakable note of conquest.

Few authors receive such a start in life. Her mother died suddenly in an American hotel. Her father, not wishing to be burdened with an eighteen-months-old daughter, left her in the hotel room and went back to England. Fate was kind. Instead of being relegated to a foundling hospital by the management, Jay Gelzer was adopted by the woman physician of the hotel, who had been a casual friend of her mother. She was then taken to St. Louis to become one of an American family of some distinction. She grew up with the bitter determination to prove to her own satisfaction that her father lost worth-while property when he departed without her. At eighteen she left home to make a career.

Jay Gelzer feels that she was undoubtedly born under a lucky star. She was the first person to fall under a subway train and the only person to do so without being hurt. The out-of-doors makes a special appeal to her and has afforded many adventures. There was, for instance, a day when two people were seen clinging to a capsized sailboat during a heavy storm. Single-handed Jay Gelzer took out a twenty-foot launch. The capsized boat was several miles from shore. Jay Gelzer blames herself for the outcome. She says: "The expedition was not an entire success. I brought in the people but could not quite manage to bring in the sailboat."

CAPTAIN DINGLE ("Mayes," page 37) comes to the Chimney Corner with a brief sketch, drawn with swift strokes of the pen that leave the colorful details to one's imagination.

I was born in Oxford, England, in 1874 [he writes] and went to sea with *Smith* of London at fourteen. Served my time, British fashion, and sailed in square-riggers from boy to master. Went to steam, fourth mate to master, and returned to the square-rigger for a rest. To steam once more. Commanded a transport in the Boer War,

Stephen Vincent Benét (page 30) stems from the island of "The Grand Duke's Finances."

Jay Gelzer's discouraging start in life only stimulated her the more.

Captain Dingle (page 37) absolutely refused four different times to remain a castaway

as Naval Reserve man was at Taku Forts in China. Twenty-two years in all at sea professionally, but am still at sea, at heart and in body. I live afloat in my little schooner. Some famous ships I made voyages in were. *Thermopylæ, Sophocles, Hesperus, Khedivieh, Lady Elise.* Was wrecked four times, in Gulf of Honduras, Red Sea, off San Roque, and off the Cape. Once received a pair of binoculars from the Hermit of Doorn for pulling some Unterseebooters off a derelict in an Atlantic January gale for him. Hocked 'em (not der Kaiser) in Southampton for eighteenpence and never got 'em out.

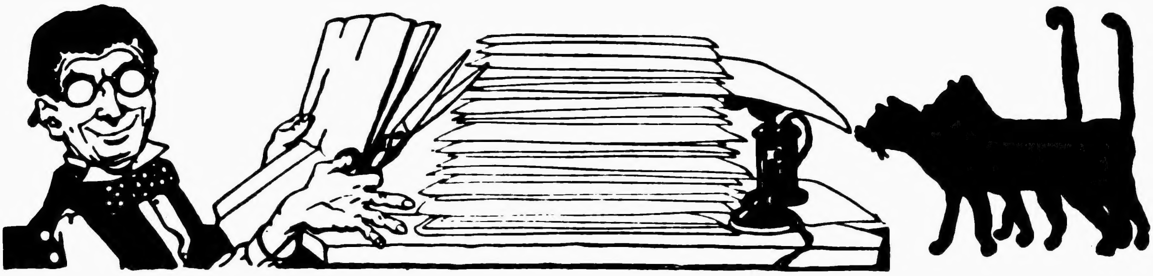
At the end of the Big War, moving to Bermuda to try to enter some service where sundry ills which had barred me from active service elsewhere might be overlooked, I sailed from New York in a twenty-eight-foot sloop single-handed, or rather, with one mate—an Airedale. Delays in the matter of papers held me up until the time was least propitious for such a trip; the last submarine flurry was at its height off the eastern coast, and the hurricane season was due Took the double chance since my family were already on the way down, and while I missed the submarine altogether, I did hit, or was hit by, the worst hurricane in thirty years, when within twenty miles of Bermuda. Was blown off, almost wrecked, took nine days more to struggle back to Bermuda under a rag of a sail, was five days without water, feeding the dog on liquid from canned goods, and took, all told, twenty-six days to make the passage. I am still wandering around the seas in a small sailboat, all of which goes to prove that too much brine in the blood is always a problem. Just when you think you are cured, out it bursts like a lot of salt-water boils.

WHAT shall constitute plagiarism? Two readers have detected in "The Soul of Caliban," by Emma-Lindsay Squier (December EVERYBODY'S), a striking similarity with a legend of a wolf-killing dog, widely circulated through Wales. The parallelism offers material for some interesting speculations.

One enclosed a narrative poem, "Beth-Gelert," by William Robert Spencer (1769-1834), in which the incidents of the theme parallel in many respects those of Miss Squier's story. Perhaps there is a coincidence of plot material here. Perhaps Miss Squier heard the legend in her travels and consciously or subconsciously wove it into her story. At any rate, her "Soul of Caliban" is so definitely set against a French-Canadian background and her characters are so individual—and so unlike those of the Welsh legend—that we freely give her full credit for the story. At the most, she could no more be accused of plagiarism than those well-known fictionists who use historical characters and actual incidents as ingredients in their work.

POSSIBLY some reader with a penchant for philology can enlighten a subscriber who comes to the Chimney Corner with a question.

For years [he writes] I have heard the expression "brass tacks." The matter has been given particular emphasis lately through the fact that General Dawes, in his acceptance speech, used the expression. Also, a brass manufacturer in Bridgeport, Conn., is sending out a little souvenir brass tack claiming that its derived meaning is something fundamental and genuine. I would like to know how the expression originated, as I have heard several different explanations. The present-day significance is, of course, well known.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

On cemetery near Elk Rapids, Mich.: "*Closed for the Night.*"
On Madison Street, Chicago, restaurant: "*Six Coarse Dinners for One Dollar.*"
Automobile sign in Adirondacks: "*Danger! Use Your Head and Your Brakes.*"
House doctor at a Rochester hotel: "*Dr. Ready.*"
Vocal instructor on Racine Ave., Chicago: "*Stuart Barker.*"
In Hartford: "*Dr. Felty, Dentist.*" (Oh, boy! Don't I *know it!*)

(*Wisconsin State Journal*)

BULLS KEEP MARKET GOING AT FULL SPEED.

(MRS. A. L. M.)

Gee, I'd have run faster'n *that*!

(*N. Y. World*)

DIES EATING LUNCHEON.

Probably choked upon seeing the amount of the check which the stupid waiter, by mistake, laid down *face up*.

(*Detroit News*)

NOTICE OF BOND SALE.
Home For Feeble-Minded Bonds.

(MRS. H. B. H.)

No, thank you, I've got all I want of *that* kind.

(*Ashland, Ky., Independent*)

ULTRA VIOLENT RAY USED TO CURE RICKETTS.

(J. R. C.)

***I* should think it would cure anything that got in its way.**

(*Syracuse Post-Standard*)

Night had just drawn a veil over the Olympus heights when the annual epidemic of footballitis broke loose and swept everybody into the vortex of its contagion. On the hill 3,000 students, the freshmen in pajamas and the others in hysterics, assembled while the Crouse college chimes pealed forth the clarion tones of "Alma Mater." (L. W. C.)

One of which was that old familiar strain, "You've Got Nothing on Us; No, Siree!"

(*Plainfield, Ill., Republican*)

Rev. Mr. Frazier will preach Sunday evening, after which the church will be closed for repairs.

(G. B.)

They ought to nail that roof down.

(*Charleston, S. C., Sunday News*)

THREE MILLION RATS KILLED IN LONDON.
BANQUET SEASON OPENS.

(D. D. S.)

Hurrah! The Prince is back home.

(*Indianapolis Star*)

Greenfield Merchant Slain in Fight Over Wife.

(G. B.)

And yet they would tell *us* that marriage "is a bed of roses."

(*Ohio State University Lantern*)

SMITHVILLE, O.—John Hicks of Akron, Pa., is around here collecting antiques of all kinds. He will take his father home with him when he returns.

(G. B.)

That's *one* way of knocking your old man.

(*Everett Herald*)

Ted Dripping, arrested north of Arlington Friday by Deputy Sheriffs Walter Beals and John McCulloch, pleaded guilty in justice's court later in the day to possession of two gallons of alleged moonshine and was fined $250 and costs.

(MRS. C. G. C.)

It sorter leaked out as to what he was up to.

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(N. Y. World)

WILL SHARKS BITE MEN?

Will they? Take a run down to Wall Street, and stand around for a while.

(Minneapolis Journal)

ANYONE finding a love bird return to 1700 Clinton, Apt. 202. Reward. (E. B. S.)

Boy, take a run down to the park, and see if that couple is still sitting on the bench.

(Kansas City Star)

KILLS HIMSELF, THEN WIFE. (C. E. R.)

Not taking any more chances.

(Pittsfield, Mass., Eagle)

Miss Juliet Dawes, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton M. Dawes of Montclair, N. J., and niece of General Charles G. Dawes, whose engagement to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Van Gunter of Clearwater, Fla., has just been announced, etc. (J. I. W.)

Pretty soft for Miss Juliet.

(Coffeyville Dawn)

"The sermon subject will be, 'Why Men Swear.' Special music will be a mixed quartet, 'He Leads Me On,' by Hosmer." (C. T. C.)

That's how it usually happens.

(Belvidere, Ill., Republican)

Twenty friends made a surprise visit on Saturday evening to Mr. and Mrs. Harry Knight at their home on Kishwaukee Street, who were lately united in marriage, to offer their congratulations. Games and music were pleasing features of a very enjoyable occasion. Refreshments were served. The newlyweds were presented by the visitors with a camisole and other gifts remembrance. (MRS. E. E. P.)

Hadn't I better shut the window? The draught seems a bit strong.

(Larimore, N. D., Pioneer)

STRAYED—Roan cow with a lumber yard around her neck. Notify Joe Freeman or Phillips Co. (V. M. A.)

Just a chip of the old block; her old man was some gadder.

(Today's Housewife)

Mrs. Charles Whale, of Strood, Kent, England, is a navigator of 25 years' service. Mrs. Whale stores and discharges her own cargo without the help of a crew. (REV. W. D. H.)

Must be one of the same family that Noah ran up against, a while back.

(From Zane Grey's "The U. P. Trail")

"The thought of losing Allison made Neale ill for a day. He almost threw up his work." (MRS. E. K.)

Evidently, Neale never tried a sea voyage.

(New Brunswick, N. J., Home News)

TWO SALESMEN and one district-manager for New Brunswick, Metuchen and Rahway, for indescent lamps, radio tubes, Xmas light outfits. Write only, do not call. (F. E. V.)

No, they probably couldn't stand the shock.

(Philadelphia Inquirer)

GIRLS—1½ years of age as floor assistants.
STRAWBRIDGE & CLOTHIER.

That's nothin'; I got a 3-wks.-old who's got 'em all licked as a floor-walker.

(Niagara Falls Gazette)

FALLS ST., 115—Would you like a nice quiet, clean room like home? I have a nice room steam-heated with privilege of bath for gentlemen only. (E. J. B.)

Well, Mother, we'll have to look further.

(Hamilton, Ohio, News)

MORROW HERE TONIGHT. (Z. P. C.)

Yes, Z. P. C., but "morrow" in the Philippines was *"here" this morning*.

(Washington Post)

Police early today raided the premises at 345 Pennsylvania Avenue, northwest, and arrested fifteen Chinamen on charges of playing mah jongg.

Hevings, pull down the curtains!

(Carson City, Nev.)

According to word received in Carson City a few days ago Mrs. George Tranter, who is in the Children's Hospital, San Francisco, is getting along very satisfactorily, following an operation. She is able to be up and do crocheting, and, the report stated, the surgeons expect to soon remove stitches taken at the time of the operation. (MISS M. F.)

Then she'll have to start that darned tidy all over again.

(New York Herald-Tribune)

Dog Bites Children And Flees.

Well, what's new about that?

(Sign in tea-room, Devon, Conn.)

Candy, Pies and Cruellers.

Yes, and I bit into one of the latter.

Everybody's Chestnut Tree

***Editor's Note:** Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.*

THE doctor rushed out of his study. "Get my bag at once," he shouted.

"Why, what is the matter?" inquired his wife.

"Some fellow has just telephoned that he can't live without me," gasped the medical man as he reached for his hat.

His wife gave a sigh of relief. "Just a moment," she said gently. "I think that call was for our daughter, dear."

TWO pretty girls kissed when they met in the post office the other day. Two men were standing near.

First Man: I'm opposed.

Second Man: Opposed to what?

First Man: Women doing men's work.

A PLANTER asked a colored preacher what subjects he usually preached on in his labors among his people.

"Oh, dif'rent subjects," said the preacher. "Sometimes Ah preaches on love, sometimes on baptism, sometimes on heaven, an' sich subjects."

"Why don't you preach occasionally on the subject of chicken-stealing?"

"Well, Ah tell yo', boss, when Ah preaches on dem subjects hit allers throws a kind o' coldness over de meetin'."

THE teacher in an East Side school sent one of her boys home with a note to his mother to give him a bath. She received the following reply:

"Miss Smith, when I send Johnny to school, I send him to be learnt and not to be smelt; he ain't no rose."

BARBER: Sonny, how do you want your hair cut?

Sonny: With a hole in the top like Daddy's.

ONE of the jury was a Kentuckian, and besides his title of "Colonel" he had a red face, a square jaw and a blustering manner.

Eleven of the jurors were for conviction; the Colonel was convinced of the prisoner's innocence. For thirty-six hours singly, in pairs and all together the eleven jurors pleaded, stormed and remonstrated. The Colonel was adamant. At last the foreman had to report that the jury could not agree.

"Why didn't you reach a verdict?" a friend asked the Colonel after court had adjourned.

"Verdict?" the Colonel cried. "Verdict? Why, I did my best, suh, but eleven such stubborn men you never saw, suh."

"OH, JOHN, just look at all these vegetables—aren't they nice and fresh!" exclaimed the wife of a man who stopped his car in front of a farmer's roadside stand. Then to the boy selling the stuff:

"How fresh everything you have is, sonny!"

"Yes, ma'am. Ye see, Pop brings it from the city market ev'ry mornin' regular."

LITTLE Frances had been struggling to learn the Lord's Prayer and her grandmother asked her how she was getting on.

"Pretty well, grandma," said she. "I can say down to the eating part already."

THE sight unseen, or rather telephonic, altercation between Mose and Rastus had reached the point at which its effectiveness depended greatly upon the immediate and present whereabouts of Mose's body.

"Niggah," the voice of Mose reached the ear of Rastus, "wheah does you-all fink Ah is at, anyway?"

Rastus never hesitated.

"Coon," he shouted back into the receiver, "you-all done am wheah you-all done wouldn' be if Ah wus deah."

FRANCES MARY was sitting on the steps with her mother one beautiful summer evening. As the stars began to appear, she said:

"Look, mother! God is popping on his lights."

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS was the kindliest of critics, but now and then some popular novelist's conceit caused him to bristle up a bit.

"You know," said one, fishing for compliments, "I get richer and richer, but all the same I think my work is falling off. My new work is not as good as my old."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mr. Howells. "You write as well as you ever did. Your taste is improving, that's all."

THE salesman approached the general agent, saying:

"Well, boss, there's one thing certain: there's a lot of women who will have to pay a big premium for fire insurance!"

"Why, how come?"

"Shingled roofs."

"ARE there any marks on the baby?" asked the anxious father.

The doctor looked the new arrival over carefully and replied:

"Yes, he's marked C. O. D."

MIKE was working diligently in his potato patch when he saw the postman coming up the road, bringing a black-edged envelope.

Mike became uneasy, and showed it.

"Hope it's not bad news," said the postman.

"It is that," said Mike, looking at the address. "It's upset I am entoirely. My brother Pat's dead. I can tell by his handwriting!"

A LOS ANGELES couple were staying recently in China. One day they were served with an excellent dinner, the composition of which they knew nothing about. When the Chinese cook came to clear the table, the wife asked him in fun, "I hope you didn't kill a stray dog from the road to make our dinner, Chang?"

"No killee dawg," answered Chang, "him al'eady dead when I picked him up."

FLORA: She calls herself a business woman. What kind of business is she interested in?

DORA: Yours and mine and other girls'; everybody's but her own.

"I DON'T see," said Mr. Clancy, as he sat in the stern of the vessel, "how the captain can find his way across the ocean. If he were going the other way, now, all he would have to do would be to follow that white streak behind her, but in front there's nothing to point the way."

"I'D like to know the intentions of that fellow who calls to see you so often," a father remarked one day.

"His intentions don't matter, Dad. I know what mine are."

"BUT, mother," objected Muriel, "I don't see how you can give me any advice as to my married life, when you have been married only once and I have already married twice."

ASKED by her Sunday school teacher to give the Bible verse for that day's lesson, a little western girl recited:

"Go ye into all the world and spread the gossip to all the people."

THE doctor was examining school children. One youngster was under weight.

"You don't drink milk?"

"Nope."

"Live on a farm and don't drink milk at all?"

"Nope, we ain't got hardly enough milk for the hogs."

MRS.: What a gossip you are! I hear you've been telling people that I'm very expensive.

MR.: Absurd! I merely told them that you are very dear to me.